

THE GOOD HOPE

by
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translated by
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THE GUTHRIE THEATER

A Play in Four Acts

CHARACTERS

Kniertje, a fisherman's widow

Geert

Barend

Jo, her niece

Cobus, her brother, a pensioner

Daantje, another pensioner

Clemens Bos, a shipowner

Mathilde, his wife

Clementine, his daughter

Simon, a shipwright

Marietje, his daughter

Mees, engaged to Marietje

Kaps, clerk to Bos

Truus, a fisherman's wife

Saart, a fisherman's widow

Jelle, a beggar

First Harbour Policeman

Second Harbour Policeman

The action takes place in a fishing village on
the coast of the North Sea, 1912.

ACT I

[*A poorly furnished room in KNIERTJE'S cottage.*]

CLEMENTINE Cobus!

COBUS (*waking with a start*). I wasn't asleep.

CLEMENTINE Head a little more this way - more still! Oh, what is the matter with you? You were sitting so well just now, and - oh, do keep your hand on your knee!

COBUS Sitting still so long makes you feel--

CLEMENTINE At least you might stop chewing.

COBUS Chewing! I'm not chewing.

(DAANTJE *comes in*)

CLEMENTINE Then why can't you keep your mouth still?

DAANTJE Good afternoon.

CLEMENTINE Good afternoon, Daan. Can't you go for another turn?

(DAANTJE *stands behind CLEMENTINE and looks over her shoulder.*)

DAANTJE Well, Miss, you see, time's up. (*Looking at sketch.*) I should never have known him!

CLEMENTINE Thank you.

DAANTJE (*putting on spectacles*). If you'll excuse my saying so, his chin ain't like that, and I don't like the eyes, but you've got his nose to a tick ... and the necktie! Beautiful! I could swear to it anywhere.

CLEMENTINE You mustn't flatter me *too* much.

DAANTJE Just look at the bed! And the curtains! Fine! Fine! (*He takes a plug of tobacco.*) Wouldn't you like me to sit to you, Miss?

CLEMENTINE Some day, perhaps. (*To COBUS*) Head higher ... mouth still!

COBUS Beg pardon, Miss, but when you're used to chewing, and you're asked not to chew, it's not so easy to stop you lips twitching. What do you say, DAAN?

DAANTJE (*sitting down at table*). I say time's up. Dinner's at four, and the Matron won't stand any nonsense.

CLEMENTINE Quite right, too, when she has you old people to deal with.

DAANTJE We hardly dare call our souls our own. It's a nice place to live in, I can tell you. Your food's thrown at you as though you was a beggar... This very morning they gave us coffee what tasted like the dregs of the water-butt -- and peas as hard as my corns.

CLEMENTINE If I were you -- mouth still, COBUS! -- I should thank Heaven I was provided for in my old age.

COBUS Yes, yes. We mustn't be ungrateful.

DAANTJE What have we got to be grateful for? I've passed my whole life at sea. I've been more voyages than I can count. I've

been shipwrecked. I've starved, I've been a sailor ever since I was ten years old... I've lost two sons at sea. And in my old age I'm to be nagged at by an impertinent baggage -- yes, that's what she is ... I'd like to tell her so to her face, and give her one in the eye too!

CLEMENTINE Daan! Please remember where you are. You're not in the public-house.

DAANTJE I ask your pardon, Miss, but it's too much. Last week I wasn't allowed out just because I happened to spit outside the spittoon. Now, I ask anyone if it's likely I did it on purpose! The almshouse is worse than jail. Once in there .. and that's the end of you. I sometimes wish the sharks had eaten me up before I left the sea.

COBUS (*chuckling*). The sharks wouldn't look at you -- you're too tough.

DAANTJE Wouldn't look at me? Why, they'd eat a skeleton. They bit old William in half, before my very eyes, and he was thin enough.

CLEMENTINE Was old William eaten by a shark?

DAANTJE A shark! Six sharks! They pounced on him the moment he fell overboard... the water was all red with his blood.

CLEMENTINE (*smiling incredulously*). How horrible! And yet I should like to see a thing like that just once.

DAANTJE *Like to see it! We had to!*

(The sound of a fiddle is heard outside.

DAANTJE goes to the window.)

COBUS (*jumping up and down in his chair to the music*). Ta-ra-ra.

CLEMENTINE (*shutting up her sketch-book*). That will do for to-day. You must sit still to-morrow or it's no good you're coming -- do you hear? (*Rises and goes to window.*)

COBUS (*getting up and stretching himself*). I'm as stiff as a poker. (*He dances to the fiddle with tottering steps.*) Ta-ra-ra.

DAANTJE (*at the window*). Go away! There's no one at home.

(JELLE *passes the window, playing the fiddle.*)

DAANTJE There's no one at home.

JELLE I come here every week.

DAANTJE They've all gone down to the harbour.

CLEMENTINE There's a copper for you. (*She throws a coin out of the window.*)

JELLE (*stopping playing*). Thank you kindly. (*He searches for the coin.*)

COBUS Behind the stone, stupid!

DAANTJE No -- farther away.

CLEMENTINE I threw it just over there. How stupid the man is! He can't be as blind as all that.

COBUS He's only got half an eye. (*Goes up to window.*) You can't see much with half an eye. (*To JELLE.*) Look behind you.

JELLE I can't see it...

DAANTJE (*looking to the right*). Hi there! Barend! Help a minute.

CLEMENTINE There's a copper somewhere out there.

(BAREND *enters with a basket of driftwood on his back.*)

BAREND You ought to have shoved it in his fist.

JELLE Thank you kindly, Miss. (*He disappears, still playing.*)

CLEMENTINE (*To BAREND*). Did you mean that for me?

BAREND (*embarrassed*). No, Miss... I didn't notice that you were here... I thought --

COBUS You think too much, my lad, except of going to sea to earn your bread, and help your poor mother.

BEREND Shut your jaw! (*Goes out through door, carrying wood.*)

COBUS Just listen to him! He's as bold as brass now, but sometimes he can't say boo to a goose. (*Laughing.*) At any rate, I'm not a coward! I don't shiver in my shoes at the thought of going to sea.

DAANTJE (*at the door*). Come along, do!

CLEMENTINE Good-bye till to-morrow. Ten o'clock, Cobus.

(COBUS and DAANTJE *stand arm in arm at the open door at back.*)

DAANTJE Can't be done, Miss. It's our morning for weeding the yard.

CLEMENTINE Well then, later -- say twelve!

(Enter BAREND.)

COBUS I'll be here. (*Takes a plug out of DAANTJE's pouch.*)

Good-day, Miss. (*The old men go out, and as they pass the window shout out jeeringly, "Good-day, cry baby!"*)

CLEMENTINE He teases you, doesn't he?

BAREND (*with an embarrassed laugh*). Yes, Miss.

CLEMENTINE Have you been down on the beach?

(BAREND *nods*.) Did you find much?

BAREND No; it was ebb-tide, and besides -- besides --Oh, I hate going down there.

CLEMENTINE Are you really afraid to go to sea, you stupid boy? (BAREND *nods shyly*.) Why, they all do it.

BAREND Yes, they all do it.

CLEMENTINE A man oughtn't to be a coward.

BAREND No, he oughtn't.

CLEMENTINE Well, then?

BAREND I'd rather stay ashore.

CLEMENTINE Pray don't think that I want to force you into going. How old are you?

BAREND I got my discharge from the army last month.

CLEMENTINE Your discharge?

BAREND Yes, seeing as how I was -- well, I don't know -- I got my discharge.

CLEMENTINE (*laughing*). That was a good thing. A timid soldier wouldn't be much use.

BAREND (*indignantly*). I'm not a bit frightened on shore. I could stick a knife into you or any one.

CLEMENTINE How brave of you! (*The sound of the siren is heard.*)

BAREND (*relapsing into shyness*). No offence, Miss! (*Some people are seen walking past the window.*) That's the *Anna*. There's been a death on board...

CLEMENTINE What! Another death!

BAREND Her flag's half-mast...

CLEMENTINE (*imitating the melancholy sound of the siren*). That's the second this week. The first was on the *Agatha Maria*.

BAREND No, the *Charlotte*.

CLEMENTINE Oh yes, so it was. The *Agatha* was last week. I wonder who it is. Don't you want to find out?

BAREND No, Miss. A chap gets used to it, and there ain't any of my people on board. (*Sadly.*) It can't be father, and it can't be brother Hendrik -- nor little Joseph -- they -- you know... and -- and Geert... he's in jail.

CLEMENTINE Yes; I heard of the disgrace he had brought on

you all.

BAREND (*in a low voice*). Disgrace!

CLEMENTINE When does he come out?

BAREND We don't exactly know.

CLEMENTINE You don't know!

BEREND He got six months.. but then he was in jail some time before he was convicted -- we don't quite know how long.

KNIERTJE (*speaking through window*). Good-day, Miss.

CLEMENTINE Good-day.

KNIERTJE How is it those hens are out again? Just look at that cock on Ari's roof! God and drive them in, Barend. Shoo! Shoo! Where's Jo? Jo? (*Enters through door at back.*)

BAREND Let them alone -- they'll go back of themselves.

KNIERTJE There's no end to the trouble we have with those hens, Miss. Now bustle about, my boy. (*Pushes BAREND towards the door.*) We don't want to have another row with Ari. (*Closes door on BAREND.*)

BAREND (*speaking outside the window*). If there's going to be a row, there will be a row.

KNIERTJE There will be a row indeed! I can't believe there's another boy so worthless as that in the whole wide world. He's a good-for-nothing lazybones! Must you be going, Miss?

CLEMENTINE I want to find out what has happened on board

the *Anna*.

KNIERTJE I had meant to go down there myself, but I hate that waiting on the bridge. If that bridge could speak! Have you finished my brother's picture, Miss?

CLEMENTINE I hope to finish to-morrow, and I want to paint Barend, too -- as he looked just now when he came in with a basket of wood on his shoulder...

KNIERTJE (*surprised*). Barend! You want to paint my Barend! (*She laughs contemptuously.*)

CLEMENTINE He doesn't seem to be exactly spoilt here.

KNIERTJE I should think not indeed. The sooner I'm rid of him the better. (*At the window.*) Go on! Drive them in! Shoo! Shoo!

BAREND (*speaking from outside*). You're making such a hullabaloo -- the old cock's frightened.

KNIERTJE Then he takes after you. (*Goes out at back.*)

CLEMENTINE Look! Look! He's sitting on Ari's roof!

(JO *enters through door. She is roughly dressed, carries a potato fork, and has very dirty hands.*)

JO Good-day, Miss.

KNIERTJE (*coming in again*). The hens have got out again, and the cock is sitting on Ari's roof.

JO (*laughing merrily*). Well, he won't lay any eggs there at any rate.

KNIERTJE Just listen to the girl, and she knows quite well that Ari and I nearly came to blows last time my hens got into his potatoes.

JO I let them out myself, you old grumbler. I happened to know that Truus and Ari dug up all their potatoes last week.

KNIERTJE Well, why couldn't you say so at once?

JO You didn't give me time! That's like her, Miss. She can't help grumbling. Never mind! She's a good sort when all's said. (*Re-enter BAREND.*) Poor little boy! Did the naughty cock sit on the roof? ...and couldn't he make it come down?

BAREND Shut your jaw!

JO I don't mind betting that if you pretend to flirt with the hens the cock will be jealous, and come down of his own accord! (*Laughing.*) Poor little boy, he looks quite pale...

BAREND For all I care, you can all go to -- (*flings out violently*).

CLEMENTINE It's too bad to tease him like that.

JO He ought to be a baker, auntie, oughtn't he? His little bare feet would look so pretty in the barley meal. (*She laughs.*)

CLEMENTINE Have you been digging potatoes, Jo?

JO Yes, ever since sunrise. They're a poor lot, nearly all rotten.

KNIERTJE Rotten? The stuff can't help being rotten. Rain, rain, day after day. Ah, Heaven is hard on the poor, and we must put up with it as best we can. Though what's to happen to us this winter -- they say it's going to be a very hard winter -- I don't know.

JO There you go! Moaning and groaning again! Do try and laugh for a change. You don't catch me looking like a funeral... Geert may be back any day now.

KNIERTJE Geert! And what then?

JO What then? Why, then -- then -- oh, nothing! Cheer up -- do! Moaning and groaning won't bring us a single more potato.

CLEMENTINE I really must go now.

BOS (*speaking through the window at back to CLEMENTINE*). Hello! You seem to live here! May I come in, Kniertje?

KNIERTJE (*cordially*). Of course, sir. Pray walk in.

(BOS *enters*.)

BOS I'm afraid my boots are a bit dirty.

KNIERTJE (*amiably*). It doesn't matter sir. Dry sand never hurt any one yet. Won't you sit down?

(*Wipes a chair and set it by table.*)

BOS (*sitting down at table*). Well, my friend, you and I are getting a year or two older. (*To JO.*) Good-day, my lass.

JO Good-day, sir. (*She shows her hands, laughing.*) I won't shakes hands.

BOS Those gloves, I suppose, are for the ball.

JO (*coquettishly*). Yes, all ready for the hornpipe and the schottische.

BOS You black-eyed baggage, you! (*To Clementine.*) Let's have a look at your picture?

CLEMENTINE No, papa, you don't know anything about it.

BOS Oh, I don't -- don't I! Your servant, Madam. Bring up a daughter regardless of expense, have her taught drawing, oh yes! But don't dare shove your nose in her sketch-book, oh no! Come, let's have a look.

CLEMENTINE No, wait till it's finished.

BOS One peep.

CLEMENTINE Oh, papa, don't! You worry me.

BOS Snubbed again!

(*Enter BAREND.*)

BAREND (*shyly*). Good-day, sir.

(*Clementine goes up to window at back.*)

BOS Ah, it's Barend. You're just the fellow I wanted to see.

BAREND Me, sir?

BOS We may want you, my man.

BAREND Want me, sir?

BOS How tall the fellow's growing!

BAREND Yes, sir.

BOS You're getting quite a man. How long have you been out of work?

BAREND (*shyly*). Nine months.

KNIERTJE That's a lie! It's over a year.

BAREND That's not true.

JO It is true. Just reckon it up. November, December --

BOS There, there! No quarrelling. Life's too short. Now, Barend, my boy, how would you like to ship on board Number 47, eh?

BAREND (*anxiously*). Number 47?

BOS Yes, *The Good Hope*.

CLEMENTINE (*astonished*). Are you going to send *The Good Hope*?

BOS (*sharply*). Take care, take care. You keep out of this.

CLEMENTINE Why this very morning Simon the shipwright told you --

BOS (*violently*). Clementine!

CLEMENTINE But papa --

BOS (*stamping his foot*). Will you have the goodness to clear out?

CLEMENTINE (*shrugging her shoulders*). It's absurd to fly into such a rage. So vulgar... Good-bye, Kniertje.

BOS Good-bye, Miss.

(Exit CLEMENTINE.)

BOS (*smiling*). She's just like her mother... a regular little spitfire! I have to put my foot down now and again, or I should have my wife and daughter running the business while I was sent to the kitchen to peel potatoes. (*Laughs.*) Not that I haven't done as much in my time... when I was a bit younger.

KNIERTJE I can answer for that!

BOS Don't they smell nice cooked with a herring? But that's all over and done with now. With a fleet of eight fishing smacks, one has no time for such things. Not that I can't still find time to take pleasure in a pair of bright eyes... like yours, you little mix! Perhaps I oughtn't to say so though... I've had my day.

KNIERTJE Never mind, sir. Go on.

BOS And what about our young friend here?

KNIERTJE Speak up, you booby!

BAREND I'd rather...

KNIERTJE (*angry*). Rather! Rather!

JO Rather! Listen to the whining skulk.

BOS No quarrelling! Come now, of course you know your own business best, my lad. But *The Good Hope* cleared 14,000 guilders on her last four voyages after the herrings. Hengst is skipper, the hands are all engaged, the crew is complete. But we want a third mate. The skipper thought you --

BAREND (*nervously*). Well, sir --

KNIERTJE Was there ever such an obstinate oaf? He ought to be driven on board with a stick.

JO If I was a man --

BOS But you're not, you see... you're just a girl, and a fine strapping wench at that! We've no use for sailors of your kind. But why won't you come, my lad? Afraid of being sea-sick? (*Laughs.*) You've been one voyage already as cabin boy...

JO He'd rather loaf round and beg. Call him a man!

BOS I'm afraid you are a bit of a milksop. Why, I went to sea with your grandfather when I would much rather have been playing with my toys; instead, I had to play with live lampreys until my fingers were like lumps of ice! I had to bite off lampreys' heads when most children are biting bread and jam at home. And your father --

BAREND My father was drowned... and brother Joseph... and brother Hendrik... No, I won't.

BOS (*amiably*). Well, well, if that's the way he looks at things, it's no good pressing him. But if we were all as squeamish, the whole fishing industry would collapse -- or we should have to go fishing with a line and hook for perch and whiting!

KNIERTJE It's enough to --

BOS Gently, gently! You can't catch a herring by main force.

JO I'd like to see it done with him!

(*JO and BOS laugh.*)

KNIERTJE It's no laughing matter for me, sir. The boy talks as though I had forgotten my husband and little Joseph, and... and... but I haven't. (*Breaks down and sobs.*) ...I haven't.

JO Don't mind him, there's a dear. (*To BAREND.*) You young skulk... you leary hang-back, how dare you?

BOS Don't cry, Kniertje. Crying won't bring the dead to life.

KNIERTJE I know that well enough, sir. It will be twelve year come next month since the *Clementine* went down off the sand-bank.

BOS Yes, the *Clementine*, it was in '88.

KNIERTJE In November. That boy was seven years old... and he talks as if he felt it more than I do.

BAREND (*nervously*). I never said so... I can hardly remember my father... or my brothers either. But... but--

BOS Well, out with it!

BAREND I want to be something else -- not a sailor.

KNIERTJE What else can you be? Are you fit for any other trade? You can't even read or write.

BAREND Is that my blame?

KNIERTJE You mean it's mine? What could I do? My pension only lasted three years. For nine years and more I've had to fend for myself.

BOS I hope you don't forget that I --

KNIERTJE No, indeed! If I hadn't had work with you and the priest -- And this brat reproaches me!

BAREND No, I didn't -- I only --

JO What this fine gentleman wants is a snug little place where he can live on his means!

BAREND I'll do anything -- dig, plant, salt fish, be a mason, a carpenter --

KNIERTJE A mason, indeed! The boy's mad... A carpenter! As if they didn't have accidents! You can get killed at any job!

BOS Your mother is quite right, Barend. There's no more risk at sea than anywhere else. Think of miners, engine-drivers, stokers... I myself often risk my neck on a rope ladder.

KNIERTJE And besides, we have no choice. God knows how we are going to get through this winter. All the potatoes are rotten this autumn, sir.

BOS Everywhere it's the same. Well, Barend, what do you say?

BAREND No, sir.

KNIERTJE Then you can clear out... I won't keep you, you lazy good-for nothing. (*Gets up and shows BAREND the door.*)

BAREND All right, mother; all right.

KNIERTJE Be off!

(*Exit BAREND. KNIERTJE goes up to window.*)

BOS Come, come, don't lose your temper.

JO If I had a son like that --

BOS You must look out for a young man first.

JO (*proudly*). I have one. If I had a son like that, I'd kill him. A man and a coward! (*Lightly.*) A man must be ready to face anything. Now, if it was Geert! Just think, auntie, if it was Geert.

BOS Geert?

JO He's not afraid of anything or anybody. He'd stand up to the devil, wouldn't he, aunt? Well, I must go back to my potatoes. Good-day, sir.

(KNIERTJE *comes back to the table.*)

BOS I say, Black-eyes, are you still laughing?

JO (*laughing boisterously*). Oh, I ought to be crying, I suppose! (*At the door, to KNIERTJE.*) Tell him about Geert. (*Exit.*)

BOS Is that your son who...

KNIERTJE Yes, sir.

BOS Six months, wasn't it?

KNIERTJE Yes, sir.

BOS Insubordination, wasn't it?

KNIERTJE Yes, sir. Couldn't keep his fists to himself.

BOS As bad as that.

KNIERTJE I believe they did it out of spite.

BOS Come now, they're too busy in the Navy to do things out of spite. The whole service would go to the dogs if every bluejacket were allowed to use his fists when things didn't go exactly to his liking.

KNIERTJE That's true enough, sir, but --

BOS And is she in love with this scamp?

KNIERTJE She's crazy about him. And no wonder! He's a splendid fellow, just like his father, and so strong. There's his picture over there. (*Points to a photograph on table.*) In those days he still wore his uniform as first-class seaman.. And now he's -- he's --

BOS Degraded?

KNIERTJE Worse -- dismissed the service.. He'd been two voyages to the Indies.. And he looked so well in his sailor collar... it's very hard. And when he comes out of jail -- whenever that is -- I don't quite know when. I shall have him on my hands too. ...To do him justice, he's not one to let the grass grow under *his* feet. A great strong fellow like him won't have much trouble in finding a berth. When he was only so high he went after the herrings.

BOS It's no use, Kniertje, I don't want him. There are discontented rascals enough and to spare nowadays. The fellows who come to us from the Navy are a rotten lot.

KNIERTJE But my son --

BOS Oh, I dare say ... but I know these fellows. They quarrel with every mortal thing.

KNIERTJE (*ingratiatingly*). Still, there would be no harm in sending him to the skipper, or direct to the office.

BOS No, don't do that. Just tell him ...

KNIERTJE Yes, sir.

BOS Just tell him that if he arrives in time he may ship on board *The Good Hope* from the wharfside. All the provisions and casks are already on board. She's sure to come back with a full cargo.

KNIERTJE (*joyfully*). Thank you, sir. Thank you kindly.

BOS That's settle then. Good-bye. (*Rises and goes to door. Murmurs outside and the sound of a bell tolling.*) What's the matter?

(KNIERTJE *goes to window and looks out.*)

KNIERTJE It's the people coming back from the harbour. There's been a death on board the *Anna*.

BOS The steamer from Pietessee? Who is it?

KNIERTJE I don't know. I think I'll go and find out.

(KNIERTJE *and BOS go out by the door and pass window.*)

(*The stage remains empty. Murmuring goes outside, and fisherfolk pass the window. The bell goes on tolling. GEERT enters through door, throws down a bundle in a red handkerchief, and look round suspiciously. He then sits down, muttering to himself despondently. He gets up again with his hands pressed to his head, goes to the cupboard and takes out a loaf of bread; then he goes back to the chair by the table, eating the bread on the way. Discontentedly he lets the bread fall and stares straight in front of him. The bell stops tolling. BAREND enters.*)

BAREND Why, it's Geert!

GEERT (*gruffly*). Yes, it's me. Well! Aren't you going to shake hands?

BAREND (*shaking him by the hand*). Have you -- have you seen mother yet?

GEERT No, where is she?

BAREND Mother ...

GEERT What are you staring at?

BAREND You haven't been ill, have you?

GEERT Ill? I'm not ill.

BAREND You look so -- so pale!

GEERT You mean down in the mouth. Let's have a look at the glass. (BAREND *gets a glass from the wall*. GEERT *looks in glass and then dashes it on the ground*.) Good Lord! What a mug!

BAREND (*timidly*). Was it -- was it very bad in jail?

GEERT Oh, splendid! Rump steak and champagne every day! Is there any gin in the house?

BAREND No.

GEERT Then fetch some. If I don't have a drop of something I shall go off the hooks altogether.

BAREND I've no money.

GEERT I have though. (*Feels in pocket and flings a purse on the table*.) Earned in quod. There!

BAREND From the inn round the corner?

GEERT I don't care where you get it, as long as you look sharp. (*Calling after him.*) Barend, is mother well, and Jo?

BAREND She's digging potatoes.

GEERT Do you think they'll have any truck with me now?

BAREND Why shouldn't they?

GEERT Because I -- (*violently.*) Don't stare at me like that!

BAREND (*embarrassed*). I can't get used to your face... It's so funny.

GEERT Funny! Come, out with it! Have they turned agen me?

BAREND I don't know.

GEERT Damn you, what do you know?

(*A silence, during which BAREND creeps out. JO enters, with a rabbit in her hand.*)

JO (*dropping the rabbit*). Geert!

GEERT Stow it! Stow the damned caterwauling!

JO I'm so glad... Geert, I'm so glad.

GEERT (*grimly*). Come, come, don't --

JO I can't help it. (*Sobs more vehemently.*)

GEERT (*releasing himself from her arms*). I -- I can't stand so much noise.

JO (*startled*). Noise?

GEERT (*irritably*). Or course you don't understand. ... How should you. Six months alone -- absolutely alone in a cell! (*He holds his hand before his eyes.*) Pull down the blind a bit. (*JO goes to window and draws curtain, then comes back to him.*) The sun's enough to drive you crazy.

JO Geert, it can't be you!

GEERT That's better.

JO Where's your beard?

GEERT They didn't like my beard. The Government insisted on having it. It's spoilt my looks, eh?

JO No how can you think I meant -- (*Sobs quietly.*)

GEERT Can't you do anything but that? Haven't you got anything to say to me? (*She laughs nervously.*) Grown grey, haven't I?

JO No, Geert.

GEERT That's a lie. (*Enter BAREND. He puts a bottle on the table. GEERT kicks away the glass.*) I've seen it myself... the devils! To shut up a sailor in a hole where you can't walk -- can't speak -- can't -- (*He crashes his fist on the table.*)

BAREND Here's the gin.

JO Gin?

GEERT Now don't you interfere! Well, you might have fetched a glass. It doesn't matter ... (*He drinks greedily out of the bottle.*) That's the tippie to brace you up. What the time?

BAREND Half-past five.

JO (*looking at the bread*). Were you hungry?

GEERT Yes... no... no... yes. Oh, I don't know. (*He puts the bottle to his mouth.*)

JO Oh, Geert, don't drink any more! You' can't stand it.

GEERT No more? I could drink a bucketful. Your health, Jo. Don't upset yourself -- I shan't get drunk. Pah! How it smells! I suppose it's because I'm not used to it. Any food in the house?

JO Look here. (*Fetches the rabbit.*) Isn't he fat? I caught him myself.

GEERT He'll do for to-morrow. Go and buy a bit of ham now, and some meat.

BAREND Meat, Geert?

JO Oh, that's extravagance! If you must buy meat, wait till Sunday.

GEERT Sunday -- Sunday! You wouldn't talk like that, if you'd eaten nothing for six months but black bread, skilly, and beans. (*To BAREND.*) Don't stand there gaping. Off with you and bring a bit of cheese as well. I feel I could eat till I burst.

(*Exit BAREND. GEERT takes up the bottle again.*)

JO Oh, Geert!

GEERT All right. Not a drop more. No baccy here, I suppose.

(JO crosses to shelf over fire and fetches pipe and tobacco jar.)

JO Oh, how glad I am! Now you'll be pleased again. Yes, there is some in the jar.

GEERT That's right. Splendid! What! Is that my old pipe?

JO I kept it for you.

GEERT And who did you keep it for while I was away? Who have you been keeping company with, eh?

JO *(laughing)*. Uncle Cobus.

GEERT *(sullenly)*. You can't kid me. You're all the same. *(Filling his pipe and smoking.)* Six months since I tasted baccy! The gin stinks and the pipe stinks.

JO You'll be all right when you've had a bit to eat.

GEERT *(putting down his pipe)*. Do you still sleep with mother?

JO Yes.

GEERT *(laughing)*. And am I to go back to the garret?

JO *(sitting on his knee)*. You'll be warm and cosy there, my boy.

KNIERTJE *(speaking outside the window)*. Why is the blind down?

JO Hush! (*She places herself in front to GEERT.*)

KNIERTJE (*coming in the door*). What's the matter? Who's been here? My best looking-glass on the floor!

GEERT (*looking around JO*). Good-day, mother.

KNIERTJE (*startled*). My God!

GEERT It's only me -- Geert!

KNIERTJE This'll be the death of me.

GEERT (*going to embrace her*). Blest if she's angry after all!

KNIERTJE (*pushing GEERT away*). No, I won't kiss you, yet.

GEERT Not yet! Why not yet!

KNIERTJE (*anxiously reproachful*). In your time you've given me a lot of happiness. You've been very good to me -- I don't forget that ... but all the same -- all the same --

GEERT Look here, if you're going to jaw me -- I've gone through enough .. and I swear I'll -- (*Going up to the door.*)

KNIERTJE What are you going to do?

GEERT Pack up my kit.

KNIERTJE This is a nice mood to come home in.

GEERT Did you expect me to grovel and whine and all that? No, thank you.

KNIERTJE All the time the people in the village kept on

whispering and looking at me; I hardly dared show my face out of doors.

GEERT (*harshly*). Any one who has anything to say agen me should say it to me straight. I'm not a thief!

KNIERTJE No... but you struck your superior officer.

GEERT (*furious*). I ought to have wrung his neck!

KNIERTJE Oh, lad, lad, you're making us all so miserable.
(*She begins to sob.*)

GEERT (*gloomily striding up and down*). Here's number two. To be treated like a beast, and then to come home and have to stand all this! (*Seizing his bundle.*) I'm damned if I -- (*Pausing at the door and flinging away bundle.*) Come, mother, stop crying. If you don't I shall go mad... Oh, damn it!

JO Do stop, auntie.

KNIERTJE Your father would never have let you come nigh him again. Not that he hadn't a good deal to put up with.

GEERT I'm glad I'm different.. less of a lick-spittle. Some people seem to think it an honour to be trampled on. Come on...
(*GEERT takes KNIERTJE by the shoulders and kisses her.*) Let the rain stop a bit.

KNIERTJE (*embracing him*). If you'd only learn to be more careful.

GEERT (*breaking out again*). If I met him to-morrow I'd knock his teeth down his dirty throat!

KNIERTJE What was it all about?

JO Yes, tell us all about it... Come and sit down quietly.

GEERT I've had about enough of sitting quietly. (*Lights his pipe and laughs.*) Let me walk and I shall keep going. (*To JO.*) It would never have happened but for you. (*He walks up and down.*)

JO (*laughing*). Come, I like that!

GEERT I warned you agen him.

JO Agen him? Agen who?

GEERT You know... you danced with him at the inn.

JO Danced?

GEERT Yes, the night afore we sailed.

JO You don't mean the cross-eyed quartermaster? I couldn't make out what you was driving at. Was it with him you had the row? Why, Geert, you yourself told me to.

GEERT You can't say no to your superior officer. He gassed lot about it on board... I heard him tell the navigator that he --

JO (*Indignantly*). What?

GEERT That he -- well, he talked as though you was a common fish.

JO Me... a common -- drab!

GEERT When he came between decks after the dog watch I let him have one in the mouth. Five minutes later I was in irons -- they kept me in 'em for six days -- the lock-up was full, you see. Then I was six months in the cells, and forbidden to serve in the navy for ten years.

KNIERTJE Now, my dear, if you'd only gone respectful-like to your commanding officer.

GEERT (*laughing bitterly*). It's easy to see you've never been a sailor, mother. Respectful-like, indeed! It was only an excuse — they was glad they'd caught me and was able to get shut of me.. When I was under arrest, they found newspapers we wasn't allowed to read... That did for me!

KNIERTJE Newspapers you wasn't allowed to read? Then why did you read them?

GEERT Why, why! You dear old soul, when I look at your face I ask myself the same question. Why do men desert? Mind, I don't blame you for shoving me into the Navy. You knew no better, and I fancied myself in the rig ... but now.. now I've some brains in my head .. now I'd warn every child, every one, not to bind himself down for fourteen years to the trade of murder!

KNIERTJE Murder? You should say such dreadful things... But there, you're excited.

GEERT Excited? Not a bit! Ruined and done for! I fought in the Atjeh campaign... ran a poor fellow through the guts with my bayonet so that his blood spurted into my eyes. I got the Atjeh medal for that job. (*Searching his pockets.*) Where' the damned thing got to? (*He takes a medal from his bundle and hurls it out of the window.*) Out it goes! I've worn it long enough as it is!

KNIERTJE Geert, Geert! I don't seem to know you. Who's made you like this?

GEERT Who! Who bound down a youngster for fourteen years. Who drilled him and bullied him and led him a dog's life? Who put him in irons for standing up for his sweetheart? I wish you'd seen me in irons... I must have looked pretty, going round and round in them,

roaring like a wild beast chained to another wild beast who'd let slip a rash word! Six days with those cursed things on your claws, and no strength to break them.! Six days with no air... no light...

JO Don't talk about it... you're so tired.

GEERT (*sitting on the table and speaking with incisive indignation*). Then the lock-up! The gloomy stinking hole! A hole without windows... a hole where you can't stand up and you can't lie down... a hole where they fling you bread and water... "Here, dog! eat that." From the lock-up to the court-martial! How they ordered me about there! "Silence! Attention! Answer! Hold your jaw!" Golden epaulets, there to pass sentence on human machines -- machines which God has shoved into this world to serve, to salute, to --

KNIERTJE Geert, Geert!

GEERT (*walking up and down*). Six months... six months they gave me to reform. It's so easy to reform on food you can't get down. Three months I pasted paper bags; sometimes I was so hungry I ate the sour musty paste; then three months picking peas and -- may I never see salt water again if this is a lie -- I used to cook any peas I could pinch in my slop pail over the gas. The handle used to get so hot I could hardly hold it, but I ate 'em half raw, and got a belly-full for once. That's how they reform people in the Navy! Reform you, because you get in a rage and down a blackguard for calling your sweetheart a whore, and read newspapers which you aren't allowed to read.

KNIERTJE It don't seem fair.

GEERT (*sarcastically*). You don't say so! Straight from the sea to a cell.. no wind, no air, no light.. always an awful stench. Then the nights, the nights, when you can't sleep, and you jump up and chuck yourself against the wall like a madman... Then walk to and fro -- four steps this way, four steps that way -- always four steps! Oh those nights, when you can't do nothing but beg and blubber and pray you may not go

mad... and curse everything... everything. (*His head falls on his hands.*)

JO (*going up to him and throwing her arms around his neck.*)
Geert!

GEERT Come, we mustn't make fools of ourselves. Give us a light! Come, mother. (GEERT and KNIERTJE *go up to window.*) (To BAREND.) Put the food on the table. (*Drawing up the blind and looking out of window.*) If there isn't the old cock on Ari's roof as usual! Would you believe it, I'm ready to sail again this minute! Two days at sea at sea... and I shall be myself again, a man again! (*Some women pass the window speaking in subdued voices.*) What on earth is Truus about? She's just run out like a lunatic and she's crying. Hi! Truus!

KNIERTJE Hush, don't call her! The *Anna* has just come in without her man. Poor woman... six children.

GEERT Is Ari...?

(KNIERTJE *nods.*)

GEERT It's damnable! (*He lets the blind down again with a gloomy, reflective gesture.*)

End of Act I.

ACT II

SCENE - Same as Act I

(JO is sitting at the table. Enter SIMON
with MARIETJE.)

JO Hullo!

MARIETJE Good-day. Your boys haven't come in yet, then?

SIMON No... they haven't come in yet... (*Turns round to go.*)

JO You're not going off again this minute!

SIMON (*dazed*). Yes.. you see -- I must find the boys. I've got to tell 'em. The boys ought to know.

MARIETJE Come, father, wait a bit.

SIMON I'll wait outside -- I must do it -- I must.

MARIETJE You're not in a fit state to do anything! You sit down!

SIMON Leave me alone - I must do it - I must. I must warn 'em. (*He goes out and is seen passing the window.*)

MARIETJE What can you do with a man like that? He's at it from morning to night. (*She looks out of the window.*)

JO Is he so bad again?

MARIETJE You should have seen him the day before

yesterday! Half the village was at his heels. While mother was alive he didn't dare. She used to hit him in the face when he came home smelling of gin! I've a good mind to try that plan myself.

JO (*laughing*). I should like Mees to hear you! He might think it was a bad look out for him.

(SIMON *passes the window again, muttering incoherently.*)

MARIETJE Mees don't drink - no more did father - once. I don't know what to do with him. I can't very well put a cork in his mouth or keep him tied up. How old is Kniertje today?

JO Sixty-one. Wonderfully active and young for her age, isn't she? Do sit down, Marietje. When are you going to get married?

(MARIETJE *sits down near table.*)

MARIETJE We should like to be married at once. (*Smiling.*) You know why! But we couldn't get a license under a fortnight - and by that time Mees will be at sea... It may be five weeks before he's back. Well, five weeks soon pass.

JO (*with exultation*). We're going to be married in December.

MARIETJE About the same time as Mees and me then! And are you --? Come - I've told you everything.

(JO *laughs but does not answer.* KNIERTJE *enters with a basket on her arm.*)

KNIERTJE Laughing again! Good-day, Marietje.

(MARIETJE and JO *meet KNIERTJE and take her cloak and basket.*)

MARIETJE (*kissing her*). I hope you'll live to be a hundred.

KNIERTJE God forbid! I couldn't afford it! (*Coming to table and opening a parcel.*) Half a pound of ginger-bread for each of the boys. Taste! Only one now, Miss Long-fingers! Half a pound of tobacco and a bag of cigars. Now Barend has turned over a new leaf his earnings come in very handy. And now what do you think of these? (*Holding up some ear-rings.*)

JO Ear-rings! Oh, give them to Geert!

KNIERTJE No. I think it's so good of Barend to have made the effort - that I mean to give them to him as a reward. One good turn deserves another.

MARIETJE Did you buy them?

KNIERTJE Buy them! Lord bless you, no! They're I don't know how many years old. My man wore 'em and his father afore him.

MARIETJE Look, they've got little ships on them -- with masts and tiny sails. Wouldn't they make a pretty brooch?

JO Why should the skulk have them? ...I should have thought that Geert, as the eldest son --

KNIERTJE Now don't call him that any more. It's not kind.

MARIETJE But you had a job to make him sign on, hadn't you?

KNIERTJE Yes... but when he found his brother was going too, he gave way. We must make excuses for him -- a boy who's not strong. (*JO laughs.*) No, he's not so very strong, or they would have taken him for the Army... and then he took the death of his father and his brother

Joseph so much to heart...

JO I can't stand this sort of thing! One day you haven't got a good word to say for him.. and the next you praise him up to the skies.

KNIERTJE Well, well, it's only natural... Whatever trouble the lad's been, in another hour I shan't have him -- in another hour... It doesn't do to part in bad blood. Stay and have something, Marietje. We've got in fresh cakes and ginger-bread -- all in honour of my birthday. Come, get ready, Jo. (JO *puts glasses on table and cake on plate.*) Saart'll be here in a minute, and the boys will like a drop too.

(COBUS and DAANTJE *pass window.*)

COBUS (*through window*). Young girls --- and a bottle of liquor! We've come at the right time.

KNIERTJE Cobus, before you come in, I'll trouble you to throw away that quid.

COBUS (*coming in with DAANTJE*). Throw it away! Not if I know it. (*Puts the plug carefully into his red handkerchief.*)

DAANTJE (*crossly*). The same thing here. The same her as at the Almshouse -- Grumble! grumble! Nag! nag!

JO (*to COBUS*). I suppose I needn't ask whether you'll have a c

COBUS No. Don't ask.. Just pour it out.

JO There you are -- brim full.

COBUS That don't matter... I won't spill a drop. (*Bends down tremulously to the table and empties glass at a gulp, chuckling at the feat.*)

DAANTJE (to MARIETJE). Is that ginger-bread? Thank'ee.
(*He yawns.*)

MARIETJE You seem a bit sleepy. (*Mimics his yawn.*)

DAANTJE When a man gets to my age... I didn't sleep a wink last night.. and I missed my nap after dinner...

JO We'd best put him to bed now!

COBUS He wouldn't mind if he had a young girl to warm his feet!

MARIETJE A hot brick would suit better, I should say.

COBUS Well, if I had my choice --

KNIERTJE You needn't talk, you old hulk! Why, the matron at the Almshouse has to help you on with your breeches every morning.

JO (*laughing*). Oh -- Uncle Cobus!

(*Enter SAART.*)

SAART (*at door*). Good-day to you all!

COBUS Come in, come in -- good liquor...

SAART Good-day, Daan; good-day, Cobus... good-day, Marietje... good-day, Jo. No, I'm not going to sit down.

KNIERTJE (*to SAART*). Have a drop?

SAART No, thank you... I can't stop... My dinner's on the fire.

KNIERTJE Just a drain, dear.

JO Oh, stow that guff! Come on, Saart, you know you want it.

SAART No. I've left my door open and if the cat gets at the pot! (KNIERTJE *holds up a glass.*) Oh well, I don't mind if I do. (Comes in, shuts door, and takes glass.) Here's good luck to the boys! - where are the boys?

KNIERTJE Geert's gone out to say good-bye all round... and Barend is with Mees, helping him put the bags and chests aboard the yawl. They'll be here in a minute. They have to be on board by three.

SAART (*drinking*). Ah, that's the stuff to put heart into a body!

JO Look at uncle. You need a handkerchief! (*Points to her nose.*)

COBUS (*taking out handkerchief*). There's going to be a change in the weather.

KNIERTJE You leave that plug where it is!

SAART I bet he stole it.

COBUS That I didn't. I came by it honestly. Bos gave me a cigarette. Well, I wasn't going to smoke a thing like that. The idea of spoiling good baccy with tissue paper! So I made this plug of it.

(*In the middle of the laughter which follows, SIMON enters. He is very drunk, and falls into a chair near the door.*)

KNIERTJE Good-day, Simon! Come along round here.

SIMON I'll do very well where I am.

COBUS Have a drink?

MARIETJE (*anxiously*). No.

SIMON (*sullenly*). Why not?

MARIETJE You'd have enough.

SIMON Oh, I have, have I! Curse you!

KNIERTJE Have you seen Geert?

SIMON (*muttering*). 'Um... 'um... Geert?....

(COBUS *offers* SIMON a glass.)

COBUS. Give him just one...

MARIETJE (*earnestly*). No, no!

SIMON No? Blast you! (*lights a short pipe.*)

(DAANTJE, *who has been nodding for some time,*
goes to sleep.)

KNIERTJE Is there much doing on the wharf, Simon?

SIMON That's all ri'.

SAART Well, I must be off -- good-bye to you all.

JO Why, you've only just come.. Do sit down.

SAART No, once I sit down... I begin to gossip and I can't afford to waste time like that. Well, just half a glass then! No - no cake -- thank you! I'm not one for cake!

(GEERT *enters. He has shaved off his beard and looks very young and jolly.*)

GEERT Now then, all hands on deck! Good-day all! (*Pointing to Simon.*) He's half-seas over already, aren't you Simon!

SIMON Ah... yes!... (*Mutters to himself.*)

MARIETJE Leave him alone, do.

GEERT (*to MARIETJE*). You needn't be so touchy. There's another quarter of an hour yet boys, so fill up your glasses. Your health, mother; and yours, Jo. Your health, Daan.

JO Look, he's gone to sleep with a piece of ginger-bread in his hand!

COBUS (*chuckling*). Last night.. last night he wet his bed ... and he was so afeared of the matron that he got up without any stockings on and dried his shirt at the fire -- but the mattress was wet too.. and before it was dry.. (*Laughs.*) Hush! hush! ... Don't let him know I told you... (*Chuckles again.*)

MARIETJE Poor old fellow!

SAART You're a nice man to tell tales of your friends like that!

COBUS Tell tales? I never said a word to the matron!

GEERT And what if you had! The idea of being afraid of the matron!

COBUS It's all very well for you to talk -- but if he'd been found out, he would have bene kept indoors for a fortnight.

GEERT Poor old devil! before I grow old like that, I hope --

JO Listen to him! We're not married yet, and here he is talking like a widower!

GEERT (*merrily*). Who knows you won't chuck me yet? Shall I wake him... I can do it without a marling-spike. (*Sings.*)

"Strike the bell,
Second Mate!
Send and call
The watch below;
Look away to wind'ard and you'll see it's
going to blow,
Look at the glass and you'll see it's mighty
low,
Telling you to hurry up and
Strike upon the bell!

(*He strikes the table with his fist. The others do the same.*)

THE OTHERS "Telling you to hurry up and
Strike upon the bell!"

(*All laugh. KNIERTJE gives DAANTJE a push which sends him over. COBUS and KNIERTJE help him up.*)

DAANTJE (*waking up amid general laughter*). The same thing may happen to you when you're my age.

GEERT I shan't live to grow old.. Lucky ships always sink!

JO Oh, Geert!

SAART Not live to grow old! You might have said that the other day when you came home looking like a wet rag... but now... your

spell in jail's done you no harm, my lad!

COBUS Ha, ha! (*Sings in a piping voice.*) "My nephew Geert's made paper bags! Hi! ha! ho!" "My nephew Geert's ---"

SAART "Made paper bags!"

THE OTHERS (*singing*). "Hi! ha! ho!"

GEERT (*laughing*). To the devil with you all! Making a joke of a thing like that.

KNIERTJE (*anxiously*). Don't be so noisy. It's not right.

JO Oh, let them have their bit of fun, mother; remember it's your birthday.. I say, Saart, as you're going to stay, you may as well sit down.

SAART I don't see anywhere to sit!

MARIETJE I don't mind standing.

SAART Ah, that's better! (*She sits down next COBUS.*)

COBUS You'll have me on the floor in a minute.

(*They all laugh.*)

MARIETJE (*to SIMON, who sits moodily hiccoughing*).
Father!

SIMON (*muttering*). You must.... you must... not.. Tha's all
ri'...

MARIETJE Come now, father, pull yourself together...

GEERT He ain't annoying any one.. let him enjoy himself in his own way.

SIMON (*getting up and making broad drunken gestures*). You mustn't... you mustn't...

MARIETJE (*crossly*). Mustn't what?

SIMON The ribs... the ribs of the ship are rotten... (*All laugh. SIMON sits down again.*) She's a floating coffin. The man who sails in her will never see port again. She's rotten. Tha's all ri'...

(*Enter MEES.*)

MEES Good-day!

KNIERTJE (*anxiously*). Are you alone? Where's Barend?
(*Goes to window.*)

MEES (*with genial roughness*). I'm sure I don't know.

COBUS I expect he's gone to say good-bye to his sweetheart.

KNIERTJE I thought he was helping you with the bags... and the chests.

MEES A row with the skipper! He's no seaman.

JO A row already?

MEES I don't know the rights of it.. but it's the same old story -- afraid -- afraid! (*To MARIETJE, who has at last persuaded SIMON to go.*) Must you go with him?

(*MARIETJE goes out with SIMON, but returns at once.*)

JO Let Mees have a drop first... Remember it's auntie's birthday.

MEES Why so it is! Well, may you live many more years, Kniertje.

KNIERTJE You've made me feel that worried...

JO (*laughing*). Worried?

KNIERTJE Yes, worried... And she laughs at it. You see, I've had an advance from Bos on Barend's wages.

GEERT Well, Barend's signed on, so that's all right. Come and sit down, mother, and don't get upset about nothing.

(JELLE's fiddle is heard outside. COBUS hums to the fiddle, and jumps up and down in his chair.)

GEERT (*at window*). Come along in, old chap. (*Opens door for JELLE.*) Can't you play something else? I'm tired of that old polka.

JO Yes, play us.. oh, what on earth do they call that thing?

COBUS Yes, yes. Play us that... what you just said!

SAART You know, Jelle....(*Singing.*) "I know a song that cheers the heart."

(*They all clap their hands to their ears.*)

MEES Oh, stow that! Let's have -- (*He hums the first bars of the "Marseillaise."* JELLE takes it up.) Ah, that's better! (*Singing.*) "Allongs - engfonds dela debrie!"

MARIETJE (*laughing*). That's the sort of French a dead

shellfish would talk.

MEES Oh, you may laugh, but once I lay in a French port, and I got on first-rate. When I said "pain" they gave me bread, and when I said "port" they opened the door. It's quite easy.

GEERT (*impatiently*). Oh, stow that guff! Strike up again, Jelle! As if we hadn't got the words, too. (JELLE *plays as before, and GEERT sings at the top of his voice.*)

"Ye sons of freedom, wake to glory!
Hark, hark, what myriads bid you rise.
Your children, sires, and grandsires hoary,
Behold their tears, and hear their cries.
To arms, to arms, ye brave!
The avenging sword unsheath."

BOS (*at window*). What's going on here? (*General consternation. A pause.*) Now then! On board with you! Time's up! (*Goes away from the window.*)

KNIERTJE He gave me quite a fright.

JO What's he in such a rage about?

MEES I couldn't make out where the voice came from.

SAART Well, you are a fault.. When you know quite well that Mynheer Bos lives not fifty yards away, and can make as much noise as a stuck pig.

MARIETJE Wasn't he just furious!...

KNIERTJE It all comes of singing these dreadful songs.

GEERT (*violently*). Damn it all! Am I in my own house or am I not? If I hadn't been so taken back by the old toad plopping down like

that, I'd have told him a few home truths for once. On board with you, indeed! Strike up again, Jelle. (*Singing.*) "To arms to arms, ye brave!"

KNIERTJE For God's sake, Geert, don't! I'm afraid that Mynheer Bos -- (*She tells JELLE to stop.*)

GEERT Afraid! afraid! On'e afraid of a sea voyage -- another'a fraid of the matron at the Almshouse, another's afraid of a paltry smack-owner. To think he should forbid me doing anything -- in my own house, just as though I was his servant!

SAART Well, my lad, if you was a smack-owner you wouldn't like to hear your crew singing socialist songs.

KNIERTJE And, besides, he knows how dependent I am.

GEERT (*furious*). Dependent! Well, don't be dependent! I suppose it's an honour for you to swab up his dirt. I'd pay him for it if I was you! I wonder you don't thank him kindly every time he allows you to empty the slops! Dependent -- on cleaning out his office for a shilling twice a week, and a few scraps thrown in! when they've crammed their own blasted stomachs, you can have what's left on the plates!

JO Don't lose your temper, you silly!

KNIERTJE Shan't I just hear about this when I go next Sunday evening!

GEERT Hear about it! And why shouldn't you hear about it? If you hadn't all your life let yourself be trodden on and treated like a slave by this bloated impostor who don't do no work himself, but lets my father and brothers go to the bottom trying to earn his dirty profits - you'd tell him straight out that it was like his damned cheek to interfere!

KNIERTJE I... I say that... God help me!

GEERT I'd rather God help you not to grovel and cringe to these people as you do! Come, Jelle, strike up! You've had money from my mother for playing the last year and more. (*Singing.*) "Ye sons of freedom, wake to glory!"

KNIERTJE Oh don't, Geert, don't! (*Puts her hand over his mouth.*)

JO Can't you stop worrying the poor old woman? On her birthday too.

(*JELLE holds out his hand for coppers.*)

COBUS Money? Sorry, all my money's at the bank! Try him. (*Points to DAANTJE.*)

DAANTJE (*crossly to JELLE*). Don't be a fool.

JELLE Thank you all kindly. (*Exit.*)

MEES (*at door, to GEERT*) Well, Geert, ain't you coming?

GEERT I'm going to wait a bit longer for Barend. What are you in such a hurry for?

SAART Don't you see! those two want to say good-bye to one another on the quiet! Good-bye, Geert. (*She slaps his cheek.*) Good-luck.

(*General hand-shaking and good wishes, during which they go out. KNIERTJE, GEERT, and JO remain. BOS enters.*)

BOS (*to GEERT*). Perhaps you don't intend to go, either.

GEERT Are you speaking to me?

BOS (*violently*). Yes, to you. Skipper Hengst has my orders, do you understand?

GEERT (*calmly*). The man's mad.

BOS (*more violently*). The harbour police have been notified.

GEERT I don't care that for you or your harbour police! You worry me! Who's told you I don't mean to go on board?

KNIERTJE I'm sure, sir, he's quite ready.

BOS The other lad who signed on with Hengst has backed out.

KNIERTJE Oh! Mother Mary!

BOS (*to COBUS and DAANTJE, who are listening outside window*). What are you prying there for? Off with you. (*They disappear.*) Nice going on you've had here -- drinking, singing ---

JO You see, sir, it's my aunt's birthday.

GEERT (*violently*). And even if it wasn't, we should do as we please.

BOS You had better change your tone, sir.

GEERT My tone? Get out of this!

KNIERTJE Geert! Geert! Please don't mind him, sir. He's so hasty.

BOS Hasty! This is all the thanks you get if you show any kindness to your inferiors. (*Threateningly.*) If you're not on board in ten minutes, I'll have you fetched by the police.

GEERT Have me fetched? Who the hell are you talking to?

JO Oh, Geert, be quiet.

BOS Insulting young blackguard! (*To KNIERTJE.*) You'd better put in another good word for the mutineer who was kicked out of the Navy!

GEERT (*to KNIERTJE.*) Did you put in a good word? (*Laughing.*) This beats all! I do the work you pay the wages. I'm not obliged to you for anything -- I spit on the rest.

BOS You're an ignorant lubber! That's all I have to say to you.

GEERT If it wasn't for my mother, I'd -- (*Seizes a chair.*)

JO and KNIERTJE (*throwing their arms around him.*) Geert!

BOS I hardly expected such treatment in this house. Kniertje, take care what you're about. Remember, I made you that advance on Barend's wages, in all good faith.

KNIERTJE I know, sir, I know.

BOS Have I ever shown you anything but kindness?

KNIERTJE No, sir! Both you and the priest...

BOS One of your sons won't go -- the other... you'll come to a bad end, my young friend!

GEERT Aboard your ship I'm a common sailor.. in this house I'm cap'en. Things have come to a pretty pass when a smack-owner won't have this and won't have that, and shoves his nose in at your window when you happen to sing something he don't like!

BOS Do you think it matters to me what you sing! But a sensible young fellow who is going to get married out to be only too glad when his employer takes an interest in him... It's all a sign of the times. You young fellows now have no respect for grey hairs.

GEERT Another sermon from the quarter-deck! Respect for grey hairs! I hope I have ... but for grey hairs that have grown grey through want and poverty.

BOS Your mother can tell you I've had my share of that. When I was a child I was put to the bait-tub. I've been out in an east wind ---

GEERT (*interrupting him*). You can come that guff with the galley, not with the deck department. You've done jolly well for yourself, and have come to be a rich man and a bit of a bully. You may say you are no worse than others. That may be true, but -- Just you leave me alone in my own house. D'ye think I forget anything. I hope my sons won't live to see the day when, like me twelve years ago, they will come crying to the smack-owner's office to ask if there is any news of their father. I hope they won't find the smack-owner sitting in front of his warm fire with him glass of grog and his cash-box beside him and be cursed and sworn at for being a nuisance -- "We'll let you know soon enough."

BOS You lie! I never said that!

GEERT Oh, we won't waste time in arguing about it, but don't you suppose I never noticed... My father had grey hair, my mother has grey hair. Jelle - that poor devil who couldn't get into the Almshouse because once in his life he stole something - Jelle too has grey hair..

BOS I can't make head or tail of your crazy talk. When you're a little older and more reasonable you'll be ashamed of it. The smack-owner and his grog by the warm fireside --

GEERT (*derisively*). And his cash-box! Don't forget the cash-box!

BOS (*losing his temper*). And with anxieties and responsibilities of which you have no idea. Who gives you all your food?

GEERT Who fetches the fish from the sea?... Who risks his life every hour of the day?... Who goes about with his hands a mass of sores from salt? Who goes six weeks without changing his clothes? ... Who sleeps like a beast — two in one bunk, between decks?... Who leaves his wife and mother nearly all his life? ... And then has to beg for alms in his old age? ... Not you, you swab! We get twenty-five per cent of the whole catch — you get seventy-five. We do the work— you sit safe at home. Your ship is insured, while we... if anything happens — may go to the devil. We're not worth insuring.

(*A child runs past the window followed by two or three girls.*)

KNIERTJE (*trying to pacify him*). Geert! Geert!

(*Fishermen and their wives pass window.*)

BOS (*with a forced laugh*). I suppose your son means to be funny. Twenty-five per cent isn't good enough for him!

GEERT I ain't likely to live in a palace on it! (*A group of fishermen and women, with MEES, MARIETJE, COBUS, DAANTJE, SAART, TRUUS, and POLICE, pass the window and stop.*) The whole share brings us in sixteen shillings a week when things go well and we don't go to the bottom. Two shillings a day for supplying the world with fish! Oh, you know what you're about when you work us on the share system.

MEES (*speaking at the window*). Aren't you coming with us?

(*BOS goes to window.*)

BOS A pleasant voyage to you, my friends. Tell the skipper -- no... I'll come down myself. Now, sir, I've got no more time to waste on you, but I'll just ask you -- when you're lying in your bunk to-night - - to think a bit of my risks.

GEERT Your risks! (*He laughs.*)

BOS Yes, my risks! If the catch is bad, if a net is lost or damaged, if the mast is struck by lightning, where do I come in? Three months ago the Expectation was run into by a steamer, and the whole crew coolly jumped overboard, without giving a thought to the ship or the nets or the catch! What about my interest then? Who has to pay for harbour dues, bait, the cost of towage provisions, casks, and salt? Who makes good all damages to materials? I do all I can, and precious little I get for my pains. I've paid your mother an advance on Barend's wages; the first thing that happens is that he deserts.

KNIERTJE Deserts? No, sir... I can't believe that!

BOS Hengst telephoned from the harbour; but for that I shouldn't have come here, where I've been grossly insulted by your other son for my pains -- and all because I object to his disturbing the neighborhood with his low songs. Good-day; I'm going down to the ship. (*Violently.*) If you're not on board in good time I'll have you fined twenty guilders under Clause Sixteen.

GEERT That's what Clause Sixteen's for.

BOS (*to KNIERTJE*). And as for you, my wife won't want you any more at present. I'm sick of the whole lot of you.

KNIERTJE But, sir, it's not my fault.

GEERT You needn't take it out on the old woman.

BOS This comes of letting your sons foul the nest for you...

After this trip they can look out for another owner who's got nothing better to do than to employ such young blackguards. (*He goes out quickly.*)

GEERT (*going to door*). Out you go! Out! you swab! (*He follows BOS to the door and slams it after him.*)

KNIERTJE (*sits on chair near door*). What a birthday! What a birthday!

JO Don't be down about it... Geert is right.

KNIERTJE Right? What have we to do with right?

GEERT You're not going after him are you?

KNIERTJE (*at the door*). No, I'm going to look for Barend. Good God, if he's deserted, he will be put in jail! Two sons....

GEERT Won't you wish me a pleasant voyage first? Or do you think that's not necessary?

KNIERTJE My head's going round and round. I'll come down to the harbour. (*She goes out.*)

JO I do feel sorry for the poor old soul.

GEERT What a swine the man is, to take her work away!

JO Where's your sou'-wester? If that's lost, now! But you gave him as good as you got, didn't you? (*She laughs.*) Come, cheer up! (*Goes and picks flower out of the window-box and gives it to him.*) There, keep that for my sake. (*She sits on his knees and bursts into tears with her head on his shoulder.*) And you'll think of me every night. My own lad! Promise to think of me -- hold me tight -- won't you? (*She jumps up as KNIERTJE re-enters.*) What, back already!

KNIERTJE Isn't he here?

GEERT D'ye think he's hiding in my pocket!

KNIERTJE (*distracted*). I met Truus, and she's seen him skulking round the house. Oh, what shall I do?

GEERT We must go off now. Come along too, mother... If the young skulk don't mean to come, your staying at home won't do any good. (*Takes his mother's arm.*)

KNIERTJE No, no, no....

GEERT Will you come after us then?

KNIERTJE (*looking round anxiously*). Yes, yes, yes. ... Don't forget your tobacco.

GEERT (*putting on his oilskin*). If you come too late to see me off, I'll never forgive you!

(JO and GEERT go out. BAREND enters through kitchen.

KNIERTJE makes an exclamation when she sees him.)

BAREND (*with his back to door*). Hush!

KNIERTJE You wretched boy!

BAREND (*more frightened*). Hush!

KNIERTJE What do you mean by "hush"? I'll call the whole village in, if you don't go after Geert and Jo this minute.

BAREND (*panting*). Keep Geert back, don't let him go!

KNIERTJE Have you gone mad with fright, you great coward?

BAREND (*sinking into a chair*). *The Good Hope* is no good -- no good at all.... her ribs are rotten... her timbers are rotten....

KNIERTJE Don't talk such rubbish! It's gone the half-hour... off you go!

BAREND (*almost weeping*). Oh, if you don't believe me....

KNIERTJE Stand up! Stand up! or I'll --

BAREND (*passionately*). Hit me! Hit me! But for the Lord's sake keep Geert from going. Simon the shipwright has warned me...

KNIERTJE Simon the shipwright indeed -- a drunken sot who can't speak two words of sense! You're a good-for-nothing wretch... first you sign on... then you desert. Stand up!

BAREND (*violently*). No, no! Not if you was to beat me to death! I won't sail in a ship that ain't seaworthy!

KNIERTJE How can you tell that? Hasn't she been laid up in dock?

BAREND Oh, she was past caulking. Simon ---

KNIERTJE Hold your tongue with your Simon? Now off you go! Here's your tobacco....

BAREND (*at the top of his voice*). I won't go -- I won't go! You haven't seen -- you don't know -- on her last voyage she made a foot of water... she's rotten.

KNIERTJE Her last voyage! It was her fourth herring trip, and she brought back a cargo of fourteen lasts! Rotten! She's only rotten because you've got to sail in her, you coward!

BAREND (*feverishly*). I looked into the hold... the casks were floating about in the water. I saw death... sitting below there.

KNIERTJE Bilge water! You'll find it in every ship. The casks floating! Don't tell that tale to an old sailor's wife. Skipper Hengst is no fool. Isn't Hengst going? And Jacob, and Mees? And your own brother... and even little Peter Stappers? (*Angrily.*) Come on now! I don't want to see you dragged on board by the police.

BAREND (*weeping*). Oh, mother, mother, let me stay at home.

KNIERTJE Why should I have such children? My children will bring me to beggary... Listen, Barend. I've had some of your wages in advance.... (*Pause.*) The police have been told about you, and they're coming to fetch you -- and -- and -- (*Pause.*) (*Harshly.*) Very well then! They shall come and fetch you. (BAREND *turns and clutches her.*) Better be fetched... than desert. (BAREND *rises and crosses swiftly to door.* KNIERTJE *stands before the door.*) Oh, that such a thing should happen in our family!

BAREND (*running towards kitchen*). Then-- then--

KNIERTJE (*stopping him*). No, you don't You shan't leave this house!

BAREND Let me go, mother! For God's sake let me go. I don't know what I'm doing... I could even --

KNIERTJE Knock me down -- that's right! You're brave enough, I see, when you've only your old mother to face. Go on -- hit me! Oh! You would hit me if you dared.

BAREND (*sinking into a chair in despair*). Oh.... Oh.... if they take me on board you'll never see me no more... You'll never see Geert no more.

KNIERTJE The ship is in God's hand. It's tempting God to be so frightened. (*More tenderly.*) Come, a great fellow of your age mustn't blubber like a child. (*Fetches packets from the table.*) Here's your tobacco, darling, and your cigars. Look, I meant to reward you for being a good boy by giving you your father's ear-rings.

BAREND (*clutching KNIERTJE's dress*). Mother dear, ... I can't... I can't.... I shall be drowned. Hide me-- hide me!

KNIERTJE (*whispers*). Have you gone out of your mind? If I believed a single word of your story, do you think I'd let Geert go? My brave, strong, handsome Geert! Now sit still while I put the ear-rings on for you. Look at them. (*As though speaking to a child.*) They're real silver... with little ships and sails on them... do sit still! There's on one... Now the other... (*Gets glass from wall by bed and comes to BAREND.*) Look at yourself in the glass, my pretty!

BAREND (*weeping*). No, no.

KNIERTJE Do be a good boy. Why must you worry me so, all about nothing? ...I've nothing in the whole world but you two boys. Come, now! Every night I will pray God and Our Lady to bring you back safe... The Sea! What's the sea? You must get used to it... then you'll make a first-rate sailor... Then --then--- (*Weeping.*) Come, Barend. (*Holding up glass.*) Just look at your ear-rings.

(*Enter two POLICEMEN.*)

FIRST POLICEMAN Skipper Hengst has applied to the Harbour Police, and if it's all the same to you, youngster, we've got not time to lose.

BAREND (*rushes to door and tries to open it. Cries out in agony.*) I won't go! I won't go! The ship's rotten!

SECOND POLICEMAN Then you shouldn't have signed on

for service on board her. We don't want to use force. Come on, man!
(*He claps him good-humouredly on the shoulder.*)

BAREND Don't touch me! Don't touch me! (*He clings desperate to the door-post.*)

SECOND POLICEMAN If you don't come along quietly, we shall have to put on the handcuffs.

BAREND Help me, mother, help me! You'll never see me again... I shall be drowned..... I shall be drowned in the dirty, stinking sea!

FIRST POLICEMAN Come on now! We've had enough of this. Let go that door. (*He seizes BAREND'S wrists.*)

BAREND (*clinging harder*). No! (*Yelling.*) You can cut my hands off first! Oh, God, oh God, oh God! (*He tries to climb the wall in his frenzy.*)

KNIERTJE (*weeping*). The boy can't help it -- he's afraid.

FIRST POLICEMAN Tell him to let go.

KNIERTJE (*seizing BAREND'S hand and unclasping it from the door-post*). Come, boy, come; that's right.... God will take care of you.

BAREND (*letting go the door and sobbing hopelessly*). You'll never see me again! Mother, you'll never see me again!

(*The POLICEMEN take BAREND out.*)

TRUUS (*at window, with timid curiosity*). What's the matter?

KNIERTJE Barend has been taken away by the police, and now

I daren't go through the village to say good-bye to them at the harbour...
Oh, the shame of it!

END of ACT II

ACT III

SCENE - The same as Acts I, and II.

TIME - Evening.

*The lamp is lighted. The stove throws a red glare
over the room. A gale is blowing outside.*

JO (*reading by bedstead*). This verse is beautiful. Just listen!

"A PRAYER TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN

"O Queen of Heaven, in they tender eyes
Love and compassion for thy children dwell;
'Tis through thy grace that God will hear
our cries,

O Mother Mary; grant He hear them well.
Lay our poor sorrows in His mighty Heart,
And we shall straight be healed of sinner's
smart."

(*Looking into the bed.*) Are you asleep? Auntie! Are you asleep?
(*Knocking is heard. JO goes to the door on tiptoe and opens it to
CLEMENTINE and KAPS, BOS's confidential clerk. She places her
finger on her lips.*) Quietly, please, Miss.

CLEMENTINE Close the door quickly, Kaps. What a storm!
My eyes are full of sand. Is Kniertje in bed?

JO She's just lying down in her clothes. She's not at all well.
Feverish, and keeps on coughing.

CLEMENTINE I have brought her some soup and some eggs.
Now then, Kaps, hurry up!

KAPS (*sulkily*). Oh, all right.

KNIERTJE (*from the bed*). Is any one there?

CLEMENTINE Yes... It's I.... Clementine.

KNIERTJE (*coming out of the alcove*). Hasn't the wind gone down yet?

CLEMENTINE I have brought you some soup, Kniertje. It will be quite a treat for you. (*To KAPS.*) Oh, you haven't spilt it!

KAPS I should like to see you keep a basin steady in this wind... with your eyes full of sand.

CLEMENTINE It's really too bad!

KAPS Eh? What? I can't hear you.

KNIERTJE Never mind, Miss. There's plenty left. Thank you kindly.

CLEMENTINE (*counting the eggs*). One, two, three -- where are the rest?

KAPS This makes four... and... ah, what a mess! (*Looking at his hand, which is dripping with yolk of egg.*) Ah...

CLEMENTINE Broken, of course!

KAPS (*taking out his purse and pocket-book*). And I carried them so carefully!

JO (*laughing*). Never mind! They'll do fine for an omelette!

CLEMENTINE (*laughing*). Is that what you call carrying them

carefully? You'd better go home.

KAPS (*irritably*). Yes, I think I had.

CLEMENTINE Well, go on. I can find my way back alone.

KAPS My purse - and my pocket-book -- and my keys -- disgusting! (KAPS *goes out, grumbling.*)

CLEMENTINE I can't make out why my father keeps that man. Well, Kniertje, is it good?

KNIERTJE Delicious, Miss. Please tell your mother I'm very grateful to her.

CLEMENTINE Catch me! Papa and mamma are as obstinate as they can be. They haven't forgotten that affair yet -- you know, when Geert told papa what he thought of him! So don't let out that I came here or brought you anything... or I shall get into trouble. Can Jo come out with me for a little and look at the sea? The waves have never been so high before.

JO I'll come with pleasure, Miss.

KNIERTJE No, no... don't leave me all alone. This is no weather to go down to the beach in. Oh!

JO what was that?

(*Enter COBUS.*)

COBUS Good Lord! That was a close shave.

JO Are you hurt?

COBUS I got a whack on my hind quarters... I may thank God

it wasn't my head. The tree by the pig-sty has broken off like a clay pipe.

KNIERTJE Did it fall on the pig-sty?

COBUS Close to it, I think.

KNIERTJE I hope the sty isn't damaged. The wood is so rotten.

JO Don't, auntie. You always think the worst. Uncle Cobus, how did you get here? It's after eight... and a terrible storm for you to be out in.

COBUS I'm on my way to fetch the doctor for Daan.

CLEMENTINE What! Is old Daan ill?

COBUS Yes. It's old age. He's taken to his bed for good. He can't keep anything down. He even brings up beans and bacon... asking your pardon, Miss.

CLEMENTINE Do they really give a poor old sick man beans and bacon?

COBUS Yes. You'd have thought they would have tempted him with roast chicken, or a beefsteak -- something light! Not a bit of it! The matron made no end of a fuss-to-day because she had to beat up an egg for him, and she wouldn't send for the doctor till this evening. Simon's going to take me there in his cart. What a wind! I'll tell you one thing -- (*Listens to the wind.*)

JO Well, go on!

COBUS It's a good job for Daan he's unconscious. He's frightened of death.

CLEMENTINE So's every one, Cobus.

COBUS (*philosophically*). Every one? I don't know so much about that. If my turn came to-morrow I should think to myself -- "We must all come to it -- all the water in the sea can't keep it away. God gives -- God takes away."... It's like this, you see -- God takes us, and we take the fish. (*They laugh.*) You needn't laugh, it all comes clear when you're out herring fishing. Sometimes I was quite afraid to split and clean the fish... When you take a herring's head and run your knife in him, I tell you the fish looks at you with such an expression -- you feel ashamed! Yet you split two casks full in an hour, and cut off 1400 heads. That means 2800 eyes looking at you -- just looking -- always looking. There were few men so good at splitting fish as I was.... How many fish haven't I killed! They were frightened, I tell you. they looked up at the clouds as if to say, "God blessed us as well as you." Now, what do you make of that? I say, we take the fish, and God takes us. We must all die -- beasts must die -- and men must die... we must all come to it....

KNIERTJE (*rousing herself*). This is pretty talk on a night like this. Brother, it looks as though you had a glass too much.

COBUS Not so much as a cup of coffee.... Is that Simon?

(*Wind.*)

KNIERTJE (*listening*). Was I right about the pig-sty or was I not? Just listen to that poor sow. I'll lay the tree has fallen on her.

JO Let me go! You aren't fit to go out.

(*KNIERTJE pushes JO aside.*)

KNIERTJE Let me be. Give me the lantern. (*Exit.*)

JO Isn't she obstinate? Pour yourself out some coffee, Uncle

Cobus. I must go and see after her. (*Exit.*)

COBUS Look out for the lamp!

CLEMENTINE (*at the window*). What a storm! (*Coming back to the table.*) Cobus, I shall thank God when *The Good Hope* is safe in harbour.

COBUS Yes... no ship will be safe to-night... but *The Good Hope* is an old ship, and it don't take much to make an old ship go down.

CLEMENTINE *You say that!*

COBUS Why, so would any one. You ain't drinking your coffee, Miss.

CLEMENTINE (*after a pause, staring before her*). Oh, how I will pray to-night!

COBUS That's very good of you, Miss... But the *Jacob* is at sea, and the *Expectation* it isn't fair to pray only for one ship.

CLEMENTINE But *The Good Hope* is rotten.... at least he said so.... (*Pauses anxiously.*)

COBUS Who said so? (*Sipping his coffee.*)

CLEMENTINE No one... I only thought-- that is -- at least -- it occurred to me --

COBUS Now you're trying to throw dust in my eyes! But heard what you said.

CLEMENTINE You mustn't speak to me like that!

COBUS (*getting up*). If *The Good Hope* was rotten, then your father ought never to have --

(*Enter KNIERTJE and JO.*)

CLEMENTINE Hold your tongue! Shut the door, Jo, quick! The lamp will be out in a minute! (*To COBUS.*) Don't frighten Kniertje.

KNIERTJE It's a good thing I went to see.

JO The pig-sty's blown down.

KNIERTJE Oh, my boys! How frightened Barend will be! And on his homeward journey too.

JO Coffee, mother.... auntie, I mean! How stupid I am! I'm always making that mistake. Won't you have a cup too, Miss! Evenings like this are so long and dreary.

(*Enter SIMON and MARIETJE.*)

SIMON Good evening! Here's a wind! Just listen to its cursed wailing.

KNIERTJE (*to MARIETJE*). Good evening! Is anything the matter with you?

MARIETJE When I think of Mees --

KNIERTJE Come, come. Just look at Jo there. Her young man is at sea too. You silly girl, you! Give her a cup of coffee to cheer her up.

MARIETJE It's six weeks since he sailed --

COBUS Don't cry out before you're hurt. Is our carriage at the door, Simon?

SIMON Yes, and I can tell you it's no joke being out in this weather. If it wasn't for old Daan --

JO (*hands him coffee*). Have a cup of coffee. That will do you good, Simon.

SIMON (*gulping it*). The devil! I've burnt my mouth. I haven't been out in a storm like this since Katrine died... I was out for hours searching for the doctor everywhere, and when he came at last, Katrine was dead.... and the baby was dead -- I'd sooner be sitting in my cart than be at sea on a night like this, though.

KNIERTJE Don't talk like that, Simon!

SIMON We've not time to lose. Are you ready, Cobus?

(*Exit COBUS and SIMON.*)

JO (*to MARIETJE*). For Heaven's sake don't sit there staring like that! Let's talk about something cheerful... that will keep us from thinking.

MARIETJE It was just as bad last night, and I had a dream - it was horrible.

CLEMENTINE Dreams mean nothing.

MARIETJE I'm not so sure it was a dream... I heard a knocking at the window. Once - and I lay quite still where I was. Twice - and I got up, but I could see nothing. And then just after I had lain down again... the knock came a third time. Like this! (*She knocks on the table.*) - and then I saw Mees' face, as pale as death! And then there was nothing -- nothing but the wind --

KNIERTJE (*in deadly anguish*). Knocked three times! Three times --

MARIETJE Always like this -- just like this. (*Knocks.*)

JO What a silly fool you are... to give the poor old woman such a turn with your knocking.

(*A knock on the door. They all start. Enter SAART and TRUUS.*)

SAART How started you all look! Good evening, Miss.

JO Thank Heaven you've come!

TRUUS May I come in too?

SAART It's dreadful weather out of doors. My neck and ears are full of sand. And cold too! You might put another log on the fire.

TRUUS (*getting out her knitting*). I couldn't stand it at home any longer. The children are all in bed. I have no one to talk to. I hear two piles have been swept away in the harbour.

KNIERTJE (*darning*). Two piles!

SAART Let's talk of something else.

JO That's just what I say. What does it matter to us? Sugar and milk, Saart?

SAART What a question! Coffee without sugar!

JO Geert never has sugar in his.

CLEMENTINE (*to TRUUS*). Your little Peter was very plucky

when The Good Hope sailed. I can see him now, waving his hand and smiling.

TRUUS (*knitting*). He's the dearest boy alive -- and barely twelve years old. You should have seen him the day the *Anna* came in without my husband. The child behaved like an angel - I hope he hasn't been very sea-sick.

(JO gets coffee for all.)

SAART You may not believe me, but if you wear red spectacles you are never sea-sick.

JO (*laughing*). Have you tried it?

SAART I passed many a night on board when my husband was living.

JO Oh, she can tell such funny stories. Do tell us about the Haarlem oil, Saart!

SAART (*chuckling*). If it hadn't been for the Haarlem oil, I shouldn't be a widow.

JO You must hear the story. Have another cup first, Saart.

(KNIERTJE gets up and goes to the window.)

SAART Thank ye, I will. What are you staring at? It's only the wind. My husband was a comical chap. You won't find his like nowadays. Some one bought him a knife in a leather sheath - paid a good price for it too -- and when he came back after a five weeks' voyage -- some one says to him: "Jacob, have you lost your knife?" He says: "What knife? You never gave me no knife!" He had all his wits about, you see! But when I came to take off his sea-boots for the first time for five weeks - bang -- out fell the knife on the ground! It had

been there all the time, and he'd never felt it!

(ALL *laugh.*)

CLEMENTINE Do you mean he kept his boots on for five weeks?

SAART Well, he had to. Oh, what a scrubbing I gave him with soap and soda when he came home! He'd never seen soap and water the whole time, and he was fair alive with the lice.

CLEMENTINE How disgusting!

SAART Poor Jacob! On his last voyage but one a wave knocked him against the bulwarks and his leg went smash -- broken! They were in a fix. The skipper was all very well for cutting corns, or anything of that sort, but setting a broken leg was beyond him. They wanted to put a splint on it, but Jacob said, "Give me Haarlem oil." Every day they rubbed his leg with it -- Haarlem oil day after day. When the poor chap got home, his leg was in such a shocking state... they had to cut it off. (*Begins to cry.*) You oughtn't to have made me tell that story again!

JO I didn't know you'd mind! You were laughing over it yourself not so long ago.

SAART Was I? I daresay! After all, we can't bring the dead to life... but when you come to think if it, it does seem a shame I'm not allowed to marry again.

CLEMENTINE Now allowed! Who could stop you?

SAART Who? Why, the folk who make the law. A year later Jacob went down in the *Transformation*. You'd think that if your man was drowned there was no more to be said. Not a bit of it! Just because the body wasn't found they couldn't say as he was dead. I'd got to

advertise in the papers three times to give him a chance of saying where he was, and if I got no answer the third time, then I was free to marry again.

TRUUS (*knitting placidly*). I don't think I shall marry again.

SAART Why should you? You've been married twice already! If you don't know all about the men by this time!

TRUUS I wish I could talk about things as you do... but I've gone through too much. Oh, I've had a time of it!

CLEMENTINE Go on, Truus! Tell us a yarn, do....

KNIERTJE But no stories of death... and misery, please.

SAART Why do you shiver like that? Have some more coffee. Come, that's better.

TRUUS (*in an expressionless voice*). I was living in Blaardingen in those days. I had been married a year and had no children -- Peter is Ari's child, you know -- and my husband went to sea in the *Magnet* - yes, it was the *Magnet* -- for the herring fishing. You can guess what happened. Otherwise I should never have met Ari, or have come to live in these parts. The *Magnet* went on the rocks somewhere or other. But I couldn't believe it for a long time...

JO (*alarmed*). Hush! Be quiet a minute....

SAART It's only the wind.

TRUUS There's a lighthouse at Blaardingen, and the keeper hoists a red ball when he sees a lugger, or a steamer, or any other vessel in the distance... and when he knows which ship it is -- it is wonderful how quick he is in recognizing them by the mast or the rigging or the sails -- God knows how! -- he lowers the ball and runs to the smack-

owner or the families of the crew and brings them the news. And when the ball is hoisted... the children run through the street -- I did it myself when I was young -- and cry: "There's a ball up -- a ball up!" And the women run to the lighthouse ... and if it is their ship they're so pleased they give the keeper money!

CLEMENTINE You were going to tell us about --

TRUUS About the *Magnet*. (*Gazing into the embers.*) My first husband was on board -- did I tell you I had only been married a year? Well, the *Magnet* was out six weeks, then seven... and the children would come and cry: "There's a ball up, Truus! There's a ball up." And I would fly to the lighthouse like a wild thing -- no one ever took any notice -- they knew why you ran! And when the keeper came down, I couldn't get a word out at first -- then I'd ask if there was nay news -- any news of the *Magnet*. No! It's the *Vigilance* or the *Lady Mary* or the *Concordia*, or what ever it happened to be... And then I used to crawl home again slowly, oh, so slowly, and walk to and fro and think of my husband -- my husband! Every day I felt a stab at my heart when I heard the children. Every day I went to the lighthouse praying that God would -- but the *Magnet* never came. The *Magnet* never came. At last I didn't dare go near the place when the ball was hoisted -- I didn't even dare to go to the door to see if the lighthouse-keeper was coming to me with news... This went on for two months -- three months, and then I had to believe. We have to pay dear for the fish!

CLEMENTINE (*after a pause*). And Ari? What happened to Ari?

TRUUS Ari....

CLEMENTINE Go on, Truus! Tell us a yarn, do.

JO Don't, Miss; he died such a short time ago.

TRUUS (*placidly*). I don't mind talking about it. He was a

good husband, never had a cross word from him - never! It was the *Anna*, and I'd only been married a year. A blow from the capstan bar - he never spoke again. If it had only happened six days later they'd have brought him home to be buried here; the sharks were swimming round the ship. They can tell when there's a dead man on board.

KNIERTJE (*to CLEMENTINE*). That's true. You never see them any other time.

TRUUS (*to CLEMENTINE*). You may be glad, Miss, that you'll never marry a fisherman. Oh, but it's dreary, to think that one you've loved should be tied to a plank with a bit of sailcloth round him, a stone fixed in it -- a turn twice round the main-mast, and then: "One, two, three!" We have to pay dear for the fish. (*She sobs.*)

JO (*trying to comfort her*). Come, Truus, don't think of it -- don't!

KNIERTJE Give her another cup of coffee.

SAART Here's another of 'em. Blessed if she ain't crying again, too. There she sits thinking of nothing but Mees.

MARIETJE I wasn't thinking of Mees... I was thinking of my little brother who was drowned.

JO (*irritably*). You all seem to take quite a pleasure in it.

MARIETJE (*knitting*). It was his second voyage -- a blow from a stay knocked him overboard. The skipper flung him a herring net, and he tried to catch hold of it, but it was too slippery. Then the mate threw him a broom; he caught it and they nearly dragged him on board, but the handle came off, and he fell back into the waves. The skipper tried again, this time with a rope - but the rope broke....

CLEMENTINE How terrible! To catch hold, and let go three

times!

MARIETJE That's what made father take to drink.

CLEMENTINE Oh, don't say that, Marietje.

MARIETJE It's true, Miss. When he came back from Pietersee with my brother's share of the profits on the trip, eighteen guilders it came to for five weeks, - no, I think it was five weeks and a half - he carried on like a madman - flung the money on the ground and cursed and swore... But I picked up the money and said we could easily find some use for it... Mother's illness and her funeral expenses had cost a great deal, and eighteen guilders is a lot of money.

JO Eighteen guilders for your child! A lot of money indeed! Eighteen -- *(She breaks off, frightened, listening to the wind.)* What's that?

SAART It's nothing. What makes you all so frightened this evening?

JO Frightened! Me frightened! *(Walks up and down by window, laughing.)* Frightened!

KNIERTJE *(looking before her and speaking as in a dream).* Yes.... Yes... if the sea could speak...

CLEMENTINE Go on, Kniertje. Do tell us a story. You must have seen so much.

KNIERTJE Ah, Miss Clementine, life at sea is only one story! Nothing but a thin plank between you and eternity. Our men have a hard life of it, and the women, too, for the matter of that. Yesterday, as I was passing the Burgomaster's they were sitting at dinner in the garden, eating shell-fish. The steam went up in the air, and the children were sitting there with folded hands, saying grace... and I couldn't help

thinking - may God forgive me for it! - that it wasn't right of the Burgomaster -- not right of him... and not right of all the others, for the wind was blowing strong from the east, and I thought of our dead ones... and the fish coming from the same water... you know what I mean. But we oughtn't to think like that! After all, it's our calling, and if you're called to do a thing it's no manner of good struggling against it. My man was a fisherman -- a fisherman among a thousand. When the lead was hove, he could tell from the sand on it exactly where he was. At night he'd often say, "We're over the 56," and sure enough it was so. He had been through pretty nearly everything a man can go through. Once he was adrift for nearly a week with three others in an open boat... They had been taking in the nets, and a thick fog came on... You couldn't see your hand before your face, much less find the lugger again.... Another time when his ship went down -- I'm sure I must have told you this -- he swam to a capsized boat with old Dirk, and climbed on top of her.. He used to say he'd never forget that night... Old Dirk was too done up or too old to get a hold on the boat. ... So my husband drove his knife into the wood, and Dirk tried to grip it -- nearly sank -- then caught it by the blade and nearly chopped three of his fingers off -- yes, every word's true -- and then my man at the risk of his life dragged him up on to the boat... In the night, old Dirk, from loss of blood or fear, went mad.... He just sat there and glared at my man with eyes like a cat's.... He spoke of the devil in him... of Satan... and all the time his blood was trickling down the side of the boat... the waves had their work to do to wash it off. Just before sunrise, the old man slipped off -- he was near gone by then -- but my husband was taken aboard by a cargo boat that happened to sight him. Much good it did him, poor fellow. Three years later -- it's twelve years ago now -- the Clementine -- your father called that boat after you, Miss - wend down off the Dogger... My man and my two elder sons were on board. Not a spar, not a coat, nothing was washed ashore. At first you can feel these things, but as the years go on you can't even remember faces. That's a mercy, for just think what it would be if we kept our memory! Truus was right... We have to pay dear for the fish. You're not crying, Miss? It's all right. We're all in God's hands, and God is great and good.

CLEMENTINE (*breaking down*). Oh God, I hope no ships will go down to-night!

JO (*starting up wildly*). Ships go down! Ships go down! One of you groaning -- another crying her eyes out! I wish I had spent the evening alone.... (*Beating her head with her hands.*) You're enough to drive me mad! Mad! - Mad!

CLEMENTINE (*astonished*). Jo, what's the matter?

JO (*passionately*). One talks of her husband - another of her brother - and my poor uncle.... you go on with your damned stories, instead of trying to cheer us up a bit. Why don't you ask me to tell you a story? (*Screaming.*) My father was drowned, drowned, drowned! And many another has been drowned, drowned! And - oh, i hate you all, you brutes -- I hate you --!!

(*She goes out wildly and slams the door after her.*)

SAART (*anxiously*). I believe she's afraid... yes - she's afraid - poor girl.

MARIETJE Shall I go and see after her?

KNIERTJE No, no! She'll come to herself if she's quiet for a bit, outside. She's been a good deal upset these last few days. Are you going, Miss?

CLEMENTINE Yes, Kniertje, it's getting late, and - and your niece - your niece was rather rude. No, I'm not offended - not a bit - but still - is any one going my way?

SAART When one gets up, all get up. Good-night, Kniertje.

MARIETJE Good-night, Kniertje.

KNIERTJE (*to CLEMENTINE*). Thank you again, Miss, for the soup and the eggs.

TRUUS Come in and have coffee with me to-morrow night... do say you will.

KNIERTJE Well, perhaps I will. I'll think about it. Good-night, Miss. Good-night, Marietje. Saart, if you see Jo outside, tell her to come in at once. (*She begins to clear the table.* CLEMENTINE, MARIETJE, TRUUS, and SAART go out. *The wind shrieks round the house* KNIERTJE *listens anxiously at the window, then she draws up her chair to the fire and begins to say her rosary. Enter JO. She sinks down on a chair, near the window, and drags off her kerchief.*) That's right, go to bed. (*Droning at her beads.*) Ave Maria, gratia plena. You're out of sorts. (*Droning.*) Wasn't it kind of Miss Clementine to come out in such weather and bring me the soup and eggs? Et in hora mortis nostra. Amen.

JO (*harshly*). No! Your sons have had to go out in the same weather for her -- and her father!

KNIERTJE And for us.

JO And for us. (*A fierce gust of wind.*) The sea is so wild to-night.

KNIERTJE Have you been down to look at it?

JO I couldn't. The wind was too strong... I couldn't keep my feet. Half the breakwater has been swept away, and the quay is under water.

(*A pause.* KNIERTJE *goes on praying.*)

JO Those gruesome stories....

KNIERTJE You're not like the same girl to-night. What's come to you? You never went on like this when Geert was in the Navy. Go to bed and pray. Prayer is our only comfort.... A sailor's wife mustn't be frightened - mustn't give way to it. In another two months or so there will be another storm -- and then another, and then another.... There are other fishermen at sea besides our boys.... *(She speaks gently and all the time tells her beads.)*

JO We hounded poor Barend to sea... up to the very last I kept nagging at him.

(Noticing that KNIERTJE is praying, she goes to the window, draws up the blind, and looks through the panes. Then, on a sudden impulse, she throws the window open. A gust of wind makes the lamp flicker wildly, then it goes out.)

KNIERTJE *(terror-stricken)*. What a crazy thing to do! How dare you? Shut the window. *(JO shuts the window, sobbing bitterly.)* Stop that crying. Look for the matches... quick now! They're on the chimneypiece. *(A pause.)* Have you got them? *(Re-lights lamp.)* Oh, what a fright you gave me! I'm quite cold. *(To JO, who is cowering over the fire.)* What are you doing there?

JO I'm afraid! I'm afraid!

KNIERTJE You've no business to be afraid.

JO If anything happens.... then I -- O God!

KNIERTJE Now don't go on like this! Be sensible... go to bed.

JO No. I'm going to stay here all night!

KNIERTJE What's the meaning of all this? I could understand it if you was married. When you're a mother you'll have some cause.

JO When I'm a mother! (*Passionately.*) You don't know what you're saying.. You don't know what you're saying! Geert and I -- (*A pause.*) Oh, I didn't dare tell you!

KNIERTJE Oh - what do you mean? Have you and Geert? (*JO sobs convulsively.*) That wasn't right of you. That wasn't right. So my son is your lover... my son - my son has that on his conscience -- - (*A pause - the wind howls.*) Don't stare into the fire like that... don't cry any more. I won't speak harsh to you, though it was wrong -- very wrong -- both of you and him. Both of you have sinned. Come, sit down here with me and we'll ask our Mother in Heaven - (*She opens her prayer-book on the table.*)

JO (*despairingly*). No, I won't pray!

KNIERTJE (*horrified*). Not pray?

JO (*desperate*). If anything happens --

KNIERTJE Nothing will happen

JO (*wildly*). If anything happens, then I'll never pray again. Never again! For then there's no God, no Blessed Lady, then there's nothing - nothing.

KNIERTJE Don't speak like that!

JO What can you do with a child if you've got no husband?

KNIERTJE Take care what you say... You are tempting god!

JO (*beating her head violently on table*). The wind is driving me mad!

(KNIERTJE *again opens the prayer-book and touches JO on the arm.*

JO *looks up, sobbing passionately, shakes her head violently and drops her head on the table again.*)

KNIERTJE *(in a tremulous voice).* Oh, merciful God, in Thee do I put my hope and trust; do not forsake me in my hour of need. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now, and in the hour of our death. Amen.

(The storm howls round the house.)

END of Act III

ACT IV

SCENE

[An old-fashioned office. A door separated from the office by the balustrade. Between door and balustrade are two benches, an old cupboard. Three windows at back with a view of the sunlit sea. A desk in front of center window. A writing table with telephone on it. A safe. Another door. On the walls lists of flotsam, tide-charts, maps, etc. In the center an iron stove.]

(BOS is seated at the table, MATHILDE is standing near it. KAPS is at his desk.)

MATHILDE Clemens!

KAPS *(at high desk, reading, his pipe in his mouth)*. ... the following flotsam: Two thousand odd ribs, marked "Kutra." Ten bulkheads, "M.S.G."

MATHILDE Be quiet one minute, Kaps.

KAPS.... Four deck-beams... two booms... five --

MATHILDE Didn't you hear me? Read it afterwards! Now, Clemens -

BOS I haven't time now...

MATHILDE Oh yes, you have. I've drawn up a circular about the church clock. I want you to ring up the Burgomaster.

BOS *(ringing impatiently)*. I wish the Burgomaster as at -- *(Telephoning.)* Put me on to the Burgomaster. Yes! All this worry when I'm up to my eyes in work. *(Suavely.)* Are you there? My little

wife wants...

MATHILDE To know whether the Burgomaster's wife will be so very kind as to come to the telephone about the circular, and... whether she thinks it would be advisable for us to --

BOS (*irritably*). Don't talk so much! (*Suavely*.) Could your wife come to the telephone a minute? (*Irritably to MATHILDE*.) Well, what am I to say? Cut it short.

MATHILDE I want you to read out the circular.

BOS (*with temper*). Read out all that rigmarole! You're crazy... what the devil do you -- (*Suavely*.) Is that you, madam? Good-morning. My little wife wants me to read the circular she has drawn up about the church clock. Are you there? Thank you! Come along! Hand the thing over. (*Reading*.) "The new church is certainly not unknown to you." What an idiotic sentence! Yes. I am reading it! "The new church has, as you know, a high tower. The tower points to heaven -- and that is only right, for at the same time it points out a lesson not without its uses to many children of this generation --"

MATHILDE Do read with a little more expression. You're spoiling it.

BOS Hold your tongue! I beg pardon, madam. I was speaking to my clerk. Yes, yes. Quite right. (*Laughs affectedly. Reading*.) "But the tower can do more than this -- it can tell the children the time! It does not do this at present. It has stood there since 1882 and has never yet answered the question, 'What's the time?' And yet it was designed for that purpose! For year's past the people living near the tower have expressed their strong desire for a clock. Will you help us?" I beg your pardon! Yes... Yes. Very nicely worded, isn't it? All the ladies on the Committee, you think, ought to subscribe the same amount? One hundred guilders. Very well. Yes. Good-bye! (*Rings off*.) Damn! Are you aware that you have let me in for giving one hundred

guilders, towards an infernal clock which nobody wants?

MATHILDE (*coldly*). Take care! It's very bad for you to go on like this. You'll have a fit one of these days.

BOS She says she'll be round here in a quarter of an hour. Now, be off!

MATHILDE Oh, I'm going, I'm going. Only I'll just say this: If you'd drink a little less in the evening, you wouldn't be in such a vile temper in the morning! (*Exit.*)

KAPS (*reading from newspaper*). Ymuiden: 24th December, "Five smacks came in to-day with shell-fish and cod. Live cod fetched 7 1/4 d., dead cod --"

BOS Put that paper away and get out the *Expectation* statement.

KAPS (*gets up and takes out a file. Reading.*) The *Jacoba*, the *Queen Wilhelmina*, the *Mathilda*, *The Good Hope* -- she's not likely to come back -- the *Expectation* -- here it is!

BOS What's the gross total?

KAPS Fourteen hundred and forty-three guilders, forty-seven.

BOS Then how came you to be so infernally stupid as to deduct four guilders for the Widows' and Orphans' Fund? You're getting softening of the brain!

KAPS You didn't say anything, sir, when a mistake occurred the other way.

BOS That will do. (*Exit BOS.*)

KAPS (*laughing disagreeably*). I heard nothing about that -- oh

no! (*Looks round and seeing that BOS has gone, pokes the fire, fills his pipe from BOS'S tobacco-jar, and takes a couple of cigars from the cigar box.*)

(*Enter SIMON.*)

SIMON Isn't Bos here?

KAPS If you mean Mynheer Bos -- no.

SIMON Is he out?

KAPS I've no time to attend to you.

SIMON I asked whether he was out?

KAPS Yes, he's out.

SIMON Any news yet?

KAPS No. The running in and out has begun again already. Mynheer Bos says that as soon as he has any information --

SIMON It will be nine weeks to-morrow.

KAPS The *Jacoba* came in all right -- and with a hundred and ninety casks of fish. She had been out fifty-nine days.

SIMON What's this chatter for? You know something.

KAPS Have you had your morning drink?

SIMON I haven't touched a drop.

KAPS Then it's time you did. What do you mean by saying that I know something? Do you think I keep all the boats on a bit of

string?

SIMON I warned you when she lay in dock... You paid no attention.

KAPS I knew what you wanted -- the price of a drink!

SIMON It's a lie! When you were there, and Miss Clementine too, I said, "The ship's rotten!" The devil himself can't patch her up. She's a floating coffin.

KAPS Well, you did say so! I don't deny it. But what then? Are you such an authority that even when you're intoxicated --

SIMON (*violently*). It's a bloody lie!

KAPS Oh, you deny that you were drunk! Of course you're such a sober, reliable shipwright, that if you say "No," my master is bound to put his ship up to auction at once, even though the Insurance Office say she's seaworthy.

SIMON That's nothing to do with me. I warned you. And now I tell you that if Mees -- my daughter's husband and all the others -- if Mees is drowned... it'll be murder!

KAPS Excuse my laughing, won't you! Now go and have a drink like a sensible man.

(*Enter MARIETJE.*)

SIMON Why didn't you stay outside as I told you? There is no news yet.

MARIETJE (*sobbing quietly*). No news! No news!

SIMON It's murder! (*Exit SIMON and MARIETJE.*)

(Enter BOS.)

BOS Who was that!

KAPS Simon and his daughter. Threats! Are you going out, sir?

BOS Threats! From that scum! I'll be back in ten minutes. If any one comes they must wait.

KAPS He had a word to say about --

BOS Thanks, I'm not interested. (Exit BOS.)

(SAART enters. KAPS creeps back to his desk.
The telephone bell rings. He puts the receiver
to his ear with a self-important air.)

KAPS I beg your pardon! What was that? Yes. I'm his clerk. Mynheer Bos will be back in ten minutes. You had better ring us up again.

SAART Good-morning, young man.

KAPS Now what are you doing here again?

SAART I've come to see you. Heavens! Isn't the wind cold? Can't I come round and warm my hands?

KAPS Keep on the other side of the partition, if you please.

SAART Why should I? I don't mind what you say, and Mynheer Bos has gone down town. (Warms herself.) What about *The Good Hope*? But there! I'd rather not ask. Seven families! What a mercy that besides the very young boys, there are three unmarried men on board! Nothing been wash ashore yet, I suppose?

KAPS No. Of course not!

SAART Well, you needn't snap me up like that.

(Enter COBUS.)

COBUS Is there any news -- any news yet?

KAPS News? What are you talking about?

COBUS (*nearly weeping*). There ought to be news of the boys -
- of - of *The Good Hope*.

KAPS Well, there isn't any news. (*More amiably.*) Even though you come to the office every day and twice a day, I can give you no news, either good or bad! You know the bad without asking me. Sixty-two days out.

COBUS The shipping office has had a telegram. Oh, please, sir -- please tell us anything you know! My sister and my niece are almost crazy with waiting.

KAPS I give you my word I -- What? Going already?

COBUS My poor niece is all alone at home - my sister, you see, it's her day at the priest's - some news must have come - I know some news has come.

KAPS Who's been telling you all this bunkum?

COBUS The clerk at the shipping office says - he says..... Oh, merciful God! (*Exit* COBUS.)

SAART I expect the old chap's right....

KAPS You can't say anything yet.

SAART But has Mynheer Bos any hope?

KAPS Hope? Well, it's nine weeks... an old tub like that... and that was a baddish storm... I wouldn't give a cent for her chances myself. They had only six weeks' provisions, too. If they had put in at an English port we should have heard.

(Enter CLEMENTINE.)

CLEMENTINE Good-morning, Saart. (*Putting her sketch-book down on BOS's desk.*) Has old Cobus been here? I saw him just now outside. Poor old fellow! How old he is looking... I scarcely recognized him.

SAART He took Daan's death very much to heart. The two were always together, and always had something to talk about. Now Cobus hasn't a single friend in the Almshouse.

CLEMENTINE (*holding up sketch-book*). Do you know who they are?

SAART I should think I did! That's Kniertje! That's Barend with a basket of drift on his shoulder... and that's -

(*Telephone. CLEMENTINE shuts up her book.*)

KAPS Mynheer Bos is out. They rang us up a minute ago.

CLEMENTINE (*goes to telephone at table*). Yes. Yes. No. Papa isn't in. How long will he be, Kaps?

KAPS Two or three minutes.

CLEMENTINE No, he won't be long! What did you say? A spar marked 47 and -- (*Trembling.*) I don't understand --! (*Gives a cry and lets the receiver fall.*)

KAPS What's the matter? What's up? (*Takes telephone.*)

CLEMENTINE (*shocked and sorrowful*). I can't listen any longer. I can't hear it.

KAPS Was that the shipping office?

CLEMENTINE (*passionately*). Barend has been washed ashore --

SAART Barend! Barend!

(*Enter BOS.*)

CLEMENTINE O God, there is no hope!

BOS What's going on here? What are you crying for?

KAPS News of *The Good Hope*.

BOS (*comes through barrier, leaving it open*). News -- what news?

KAPS A clerk at the shipping office is at the telephone.

BOS The shipping office! Why the devil didn't you say so at once... Out of the way every one. (*To SAART.*) What are you standing there for, gaping and -Clear out!

(*SAART goes out.*)

BOS (*ringing*). Hullo! (*Angrily to CLEMENTINE.*) Do for Heaven's sake stop snivelling. A spar, you say? Marked 47. Yes, that must be it. A corpse? Much decomposed? Common seaman -- Barend Vermeer. Who recognized him? Skipper Maatsuiker. Ear-rings? Yes, yes, silver ear-rings... It is useless, you say, for any one to be sent from

here to identify him? Yes, it is sad -- terribly sad! I don't know what we've done in the parts to lose so many boats lately. Looks like a judgment. Yes, yes. Still, after all, we must submit to the will of God. Yes, yes. Many thanks. Please send me the official report as soon as possible. I will inform the underwriters. Good morning. (*Hangs up the receiver.*) What a terrible thing - I am quite upset - twelve men! (*To CLEMENTINE.*) You'd better go to your mother. How silly it was of you to blurt out what you had heard before that woman. Now half the village will be here before I can look round. Don't you hear me.

CLEMENTINE Why didn't you listen? (*Sobs.*)

BOS Listen!

CLEMENTINE When Simon, the shipwright --

BOS The rascal was drunk.

CLEMENTINE (*passionately*). That's not true!

BOS I tell you he was drunk -- and even supposing he wasn't -- what right have you to poke your nose into affairs which don't concern you?

CLEMENTINE O God! I am guilty too.

BOS Guilty! Guilty! The idea of using a word like that in connection with this unfortunate accident!

CLEMENTINE He said the ship was a floating coffin; I heard him distinctly, and I heard you answer that in any case this should be the last voyage which *The Good Hope* -

BOS A floating coffin, indeed! You seem to forget that the *Northern Star*, and the *William III*, and the *Prince John* have all been wrecked too, and I could name a dozen more. Why not say at once that

half the fishing-smacks in Holland are floating coffins? Did you ever hear anything like it, Kaps?

KAPS I beg pardon, sir. I wasn't listening.

BOS You young people are so cocksure. You don't wait to be told anything. Aren't you aware of the fact that the underwriters have all ships inspected every year? Do you imagine that when I ring up the insurance agent and ask for my fourteen thousand guilders, that he will pay it without being satisfied that *The Good Hope* was seaworthy? If you talk in this hysterical way you'll ruin my reputation. Luckily people know me well enough to be sure --

CLEMENTINE (*sadly*). If I were a smack-owner and I heard --

BOS Heaven preserve the fishing industry from smack-owners who paint bad pictures and cry their eyes out over bad poetry! Business is business, and a business man who gave way to his feelings would soon come to grief. Eh, Kaps?

(KAPS *makes a gesture showing he doesn't wish to listen.*)

BOS You go to your mother, and get these foolish ideas out of your head.

KAPS I have just found the list of the crew. (*Reading.*) "Wilhelm Hengst, 37 years old, married, 4 children."

BOS Kindly wait till my daughter --

CLEMENTINE I won't say a word more.

KAPS (*reading*). "Geert Vermeer, unmarried, 26; Jacob Boom, unmarried, 20; Berend Vermeer --"

(Enter TRUUS and MARIETJE.)

TRUUS (*leaning on barrier*). Is there any news -- news of my son? (*In wild despair.*) Oh, don't tell me, sir, that --

BOS I am very sorry, Mrs. Stappers --

(TRUUS *sinks back on the bench.*)

MARIETJE It can't be true. It's not true --

BOS Barend Vermeer has been washed ashore. You know what that means... and a spar marked 47.

MARIETJE (*flings herself down and clings to barrier*). Then -- then -- (*Laughs hysterically.*)

(CLEMENTINE *goes to MARIETJE and tries to comfort her.*)

TRUUS Peter, my little Peter!

MARIETJE Go away! Leave me alone. I won't go home! I want to die... to die.

TRUUS On his first voyage -- and him standing there so brave -- and waving his hand. Mother Mary! Mother Mary!

(TRUUS *goes out, sobbing piteously.* MARIETJE *laughs wildly.*)

CLEMENTINE (*leading MARIETJE to the door*). Cry, dear -- try and cry... Poor Marietje. It will do you good to cry. (*They go out.*)

BOS It's a judgment. There hasn't been such a storm for years. (*To KAPS.*) Take the keys -- get me out the Widows' and

Orphans' Fund. You seem half asleep to-day. Don't answer me, sir. (BOS *sits at table.*) On the Fund up to date, ninety-five widows, fourteen infirm fishermen, thirty-five children.

KAPS The Fund will never stand it -- we shall have to get up an appeal.

MATHILDE (*entering*). How unfortunate you are so busy. We have made a few alterations in the appeal about the church clock. The Burgomaster's wife wants to get your approval of it before it is printed. Do come in. She thinks you are not interested, and is nearly in tears.

BOS There are tears enough here. By the way, Mathilde, I want you to ask the Burgomaster's wife to help with an appeal for *The Good Hope* victims.

MATHILDE What! Two appeals, one on top of the other! Oh, I don't think I can do that!

BOS (*going out in front of her*). Well, I must ask her then.

CLEMENTINE Kaps! Kaps! (*Sitting down on chair by barrier.*) I am so miserable.

KAPS Excuse my saying so, but it's very foolish of you. Just think of all the ships that are wrecked.... *The Good Hope* hardly counts. I have here -- now where is it? well, it's Lloyd's list for October -- only for October -- mind you-- and one hundred and five sailing ships and thirty steamers were wrecked -- five hundred deaths in one month. (*Pointing to the sea.*) Look at it to-day, so smooth -- so calm -- with the gulls floating over it -- who would believe that it kills so many men?

(*Enter JO and COBUS.*)

CLEMENTINE (*to Jo and COBUS, who stay behind the partition as if dazed*). Come in here, Jo. Jo! (*Opens the barrier for*

JO.)

COBUS It's true. It's true. (*Falteringly.*) Saart has told us.

BOS (*re-entering*). I suppose you've heard --

JO About Barend -- yes. But Geert.... sometimes they get away in a boat.

BOS I'm afraid I can't encourage you to think that. It isn't merely the fact of the spar -- but the body was in an advanced stage of decomposition.

JO But it may not be Barend at all! Who says it's Barend?

BOS Maatsuiker, the skipper of the *Expectation*, has identified him. Besides -- the ear-rings --

JO Maatsuiker -- Maatsuiker! And who's he? Suppose he's made a mistake... I've come to ask you for travelling money, sir. Then I can go to Niewiedep myself --

BOS Absurd!

JO (*weeping*). Barend must be buried.

(*Enter SIMON, drunk and sullen. He leans over barrier.*)

BOS The Burgomaster at Niewiedep will see to that.

SIMON I-- I've just heard that you -- (*Makes a threatening gesture at BOS.*)

BOS (*with nervous violence*). Be off, you drunkard!

SIMON I - I don't want to kill you - I - I don't want any sins on my conscience.

BOS Fetch a policeman, Kaps.... I'll have this drunken --

SIMON (*steadying himself against the partition*). No - you wait a bit... I'll go of myself in a minute.... I - I only want to say -- that this is a nice affair about *The Good Hope*.

BOS Get out of this at once! (*Advancing towards SIMON.*)

SIMON (*cunningly*). Don't you come too close to me.... (*Draws knife.*) It's not safe to come too close to a man who's got a knife. All the same, I don't want to do you any harm... I just want to say that I warned you when she lay in dock.

BOS You lie -- you're a drunken scoundrel!

SIMON (*laughing horribly*). I am, am I? Now, just for a joke, you ask your clerk and your daughter -- they were there -- they heard --

BOS It's a lie! But I don't know why I trouble to answer you, you sot! You're not worth it. It's your employer who works for me -- not you. I have to reckon with him, not with you. Isn't that so, Kaps?

SIMON My master -- doesn't do the caulking himself. (*To KAPS.*) Didn't I warn him? Weren't you there?

KAPS (*glancing anxiously at BOS*). No, I wasn't there, or if I was there, I heard nothing...

BOS (*to CLÉMENTINE*). Now you -- you -- did this sot?

CLEMENTINE (*nervously, nearly crying*). Papa --

BOS (*threateningly*). If you, my own daughter -- Answer!

CLEMENTINE (*feebly*). I ... don't remember.

SIMON Ah! That's -- that's low. That's damned low! I said that the ship was rotten -- rotten --

BOS The ravings of a muddled sot! (*Truculently*.) Well, you have called my clerk and my daughter as witnesses -- you hear what they say?

COBUS (*excitedly*). Yes, but... yes... but... Now I begin to remember.

BOS What next? I suppose you want me to believe that you warned me, too.

COBUS No -- no that wouldn't be the truth... But she knows - your daughter knows. Oh, she may say it isn't so now, but I remember. It was the second evening of the storm. We was at my sister Kniertje's, and you said -- I'll take my oath you said --

CLEMENTINE Did I?.....

COBUS (*indignantly*). Yes, you did. That was the night. I remember your exact words. And I said if your father knew *The Good Hope* was rotten --

JO (*springing up and pouring forth her words in a torrent*). You -- you liar! You began to cry -- you was afraid of what might happen -- you said you hoped no ships would go down -- I was there when you said it -- so was Truus -- so was --- (*To BOS*.) Oh, you swine!

BOS Swine, indeed! We who keep you common people alive year in, year out -- we who do everything for you -- and you haven't the decency to take our word before that of a low ragamuffin who's too drunk to stand on his feet!

JO (*maddened with passion*). Take your word! Your word! You're lying, lying -- and so is she!

BOS (*threateningly*). Get out of my office!

JO (*past control*). You had Barend dragged on board by the police! Geert was too proud to let that happen -- now both of them - You scoundrel! (*Laughs convulsively.*) Oh, you needn't trouble to show me the door. (BOS *opens the door.*) We're going. If I stayed her any longer I should spit in your face. (*Makes a threatening gesture.*)

COBUS (*trying to restrain her*). Come, Jo, come....

BOS I am ready to make every excuse for you, but you don't know what you're talking about. So you think I don't lose anything? Suppose that poor fool there had warned me - which, of course, is a pure invention - could I as a business man be expected to take him seriously - a sot who's generally too drunk to know one end of a tool from the other.

SIMON (*stuttering*). I - I - told you and - him... and - her - she was a floating coffin - a coffin. I said --

JO (*breaking out*). If you knew it, how could you let them go? Oh -- Geert and Barend and Mees -- and all the others. Give me the travelling money -- let me go to Niewiedep myself -- and I won't say another word...

BOS (*sternly*). No! Not a red cent. A girl who has behaved in such a disgraceful fashion. Besides, the shipping office people say that it is quite useless for any one to go to Niewiedep.

JO (*reeling to the door*). Useless! Useless! What will become of me now -- what will become of me? (*She goes out, followed by COBUS.*)

BOS (*walking up and down*). (*To CLEMENTINE*.) And if you ever set foot in my office again --

CLEMENTINE No, I'll never come here again... (*A long pause*.) And father.... (*Bursting into tears*.) I shall never be able to respect you again... I shall never be able to respect myself..... (*Exits*.)

BOS Too absurd! That minx is ready to ruin my reputation with her boarding-school tricks... (*JELLE's fiddle is heard outside*.) This is the last straw. (*Opens window*.) Be off! Not a stiver do you get here. This business will ruin me if I'm not careful. (*He shuts window and goes to the telephone*.) Hullo! Put me on to Dirksen -- Dirksen, the insurance agent. Hullo! Are you there, Dirksen? It's all up with The Good Hope. A spar with my mark on it has been washed ashore.... and the body of one of the crew. (*Acrimoniously*.) What's that you say? Not a shadow of a doubt. Sixty-two days out, you know. No chance at all. (*As he speaks the last few words KNIERTJE enters. Reassured*.) Very well, I'll wait for you at my office; but you won't be long, will you? Yes, fourteen thousand guilders; quite right. Good-day. (*Rings off*.)

KNIERTJE (*mechanically*). I --- (*Sinks on to bench and weeps quietly*.)

BOS (*at bureau*). Have you got that insurance policy ready? You get everything out of its place, curse you!

KAPS There it is, behind the deed-box.

BOS (*snubbing him*). That will do! (*Turning round, the portfolio in his hand*.) Why didn't you knock?

KNIERTJE I wanted --

BOS You should have been here five minutes sooner. (*Sourly*.) The girl who lives with you came and made such a scene that I nearly

sent for the police. (*Roughly.*) Come in if you want to speak to me.

KNIERTJE (*coming through the barrier and sinking into chair*). Is it true.... is it true what the priest says? (BOS *nods.*) Oh -- oh... (*Moans and sits down, staring in front of her, with her arms falling limply by her side.*)

BOS I'm sorry for you. So far as I know, you've always been a decent, hard-working woman -- and your husband was a respectable man. But your children -- I'm sorry to have to say it after what has happened -- your children, and -- that niece of yours were never any good. (KNIERTJE's *head falls on her breast.*) Think of all the years you came to my house -- and the good friends you had in us -- till your son Geert threatened me with his fist. And your other son. (*Alarmed, he seizes her by the arm.*) Kniertje! Kaps! Kaps! Get some water! (KAPS *brings the water-bottle from desk, and roughly bathes her forehead and wrists.*) Damn it all -- here's an unfortunate business.

KAPS Shall I call your wife, or Miss Clementine?

BOS No. Stay here. She's coming to already.

(KNIERTJE, *after staring unconsciously before her for a time, breaks into a long low sob.*)

KAPS Kniertje!

BOS Be quiet! Let her cry....

KNIERTJE (*in a choked voice*). He didn't want to go... He didn't want to go... and with my own hands I took his hands from the door-post...

BOS You have nothing to reproach yourself with...

KNIERTJE (*in the same tone*). Before he went, I put his

father's ear-rings in his ears. It was like a lamb.... being driven to the slaughter.

BOS Come, come.

KNIERTJE (*groaning*). And -- my other boy -- I never said good-bye to him. "If you come too late to see me off" - those were his very words - "I'll never forgive you" -- "I'll never forgive you."

BOS (*moved*). Stop! For God's sake, stop!

KNIERTJE Twelve years ago -- when the Clementine went down -- I sat here just as I do now. (*Puts her trembling hands to her face.*)

BOS Come, you must be brave. Pull yourself together.

(*Enter MATHILDE.*)

MATHILDE Clemens! Oh, my poor dear Kniertje -- how sorry I am for you -- it's too sad -- it's terrible -- two sons!

KNIERTJE (*staring before her*). My husband -- and four sons, ma'am.

MATHILDE Four? But don't be anxious about the future, Kniertje. We've drawn up an appeal -- the Burgomaster's wife is taking the greatest interest in it -- and it will appear in all the papers to-morrow. Here, Kaps.... (BOS *signs her to go away.*) Let me stay a minute, Clemens. (*Sweetly.*) I've got two nice cutlets for you. They'll do you good... and we'll be friends again. You will let her come back and work for us, won't you, Clemens? We won't forget you, Kniertje. Good-bye, I hope you'll soon feel better. (*Exit.*)

BOS No... we won't forget you!

KNIERTJE My only hope is my niece's child.

BOS (*amazed*). Child?....

KNIERTJE Yes -- worse luck -- she's going to have a child. My son's child. (*Smiling feebly.*) Worse luck? No... What am I saying... It's not bad luck at all...

BOS And you have the calm assurance to tell me this! You're not ashamed of it! So you encourage immorality under your roof Are you aware that the regulations of the Fund stipulate that no assistance shall be given to those who lead a vicious life... or in any way fail to conduct themselves to our satisfaction.

KNIERTJE (*drearily*). The gentlemen must know -- what they ought to do with me.. the gentlemen--

BOS (*fetches his hat and gloves from table*). It will be a difficult thing to get over with the Committee, Kniertje -- With the Committee of the Fund, I mean. Your son, just out of prison -- leader in a mutiny -- and your niece. Oh, shocking! Well, I'll do my best. I'll try and put in a word for you -- but I can make no promises. (*Getting up and closing safe.*) You can sit there a bit if you like. (*Exit.*)

MATHILDE (*off*). Kaps! Kaps!

(KAPS *gets up, disappears for a moment, then reappears with a dish and an enamelled mug.*)

KAPS You can bring back the dish next time you're passing -- and you're to come in on Sunday evening as usual to clean up.

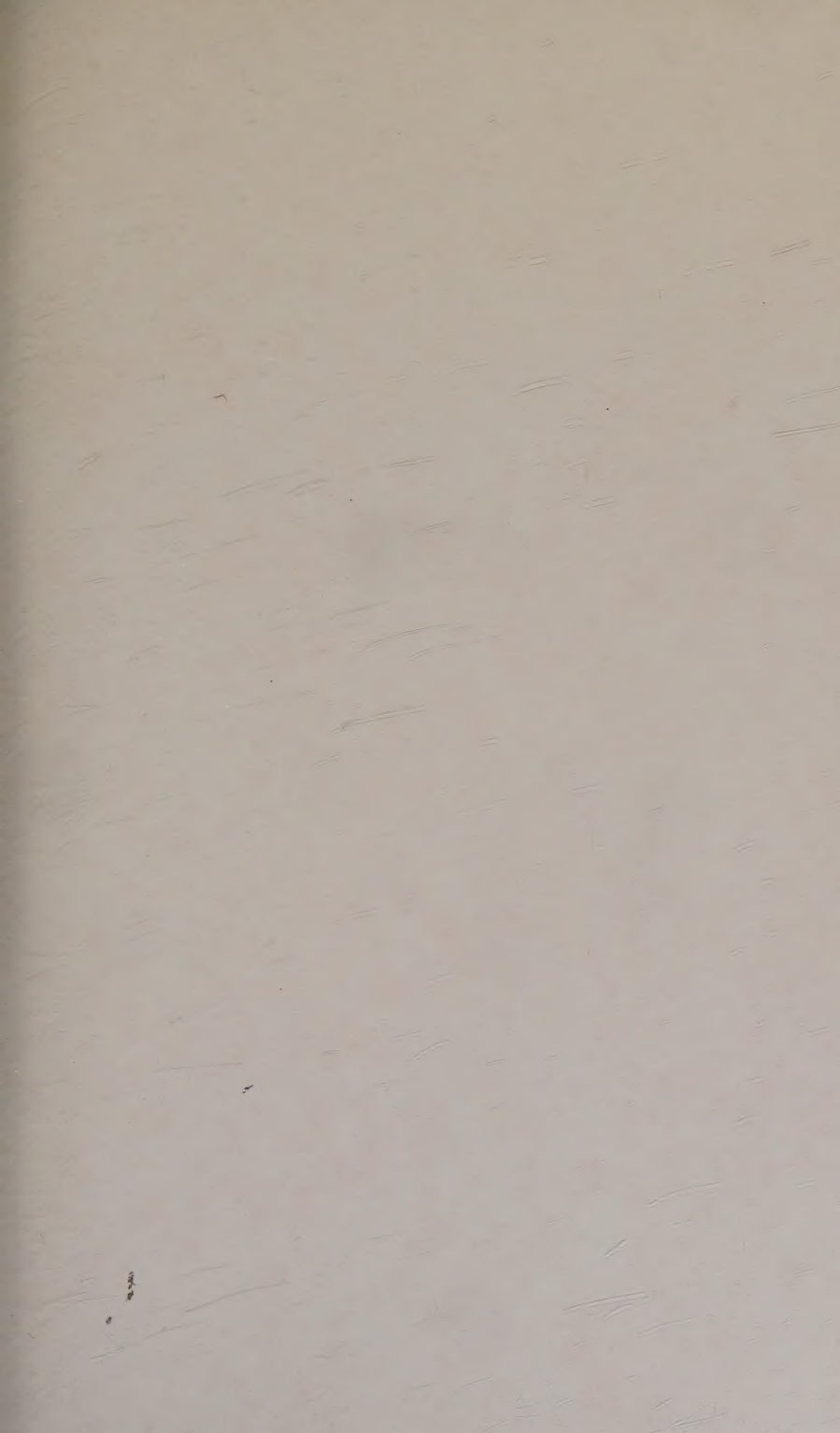
(KAPS *opens barrier for KNIERTJE to go out.* KNIERTJE *stars* before her. KAPS *puts the jug and dish into her listless hands.* KNIERTJE *sits motionless for a minute in*

*dazed sorrow, mumbles... and totters out of the office.
KAPS takes paper from his pocket and reads.)*

KAPS (*reading*). "An appeal to public generosity."
(*Advancing, and leaning against BOS's desk, with an ironical smile.*)
"Fellow - citizens. Having every confidence in your generous sympathy
with those in distress, we venture once more to appeal to your charity.
We wish to enlist your assistance on behalf of a number of widows and
orphans bereaved by the recent great storm. *The Good Hope ---*"

(KAPS *goes up to desk, still reading, as the curtain falls.*)

THE END



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